

SEnECA project starts with ambitious visions for EU-Central Asian relations

From 23 to 24 January 2018, the kick-off meeting of the Horizon 2020 project “SEnECA – Strengthening and energizing EU-Central Asia Relations” took place in Berlin (hosted by the Institut fuer Europaeische Politik, IEP). The meeting was the first opportunity for the twelve consortium members from think tanks, universities and NGOs in Europe and Central Asia to meet and lay the foundation for future cooperation.

The greatest expectation of the involved partners at the meeting was to clearly understand the responsibilities in this international and interdisciplinary project with five work packages and many intertwined tasks. This goal was successfully achieved with the support of very motivated and well-prepared coordinators from the University of Duisburg-Essen and the IEP. They made sure that topics such as new forms of scientific cooperation, future priorities for EU policy-making towards Central Asia and questions of awareness-raising and dissemination were thoroughly discussed and that consensus was achieved.

Ms. Silvie Rohanova, Head of the European Political Strategy Center of the European Commission, provided support with specifics of the Horizon 2020 programme with regard to documentation, finances and ethics requirements. She described the SEnECA project as unique as it incorporated all five Central Asian countries (including Turkmenistan) and as it has set the ambitious goal to create a sustainable research and stakeholder network between the EU and Central Asia, which will stimulate and deepen the relations between the two regions.

In his keynote speech, Mr. Michael Siebert, Head of the Division for Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus from the German Federal Foreign Office, emphasised the special role of the EU in Central Asia in comparison to other global players such as China, Russia or the US. Next to interests like stability and trade relations, the EU also sought to establish a platform of shared values and understanding with Central Asian countries. In order to arrive at such a common ground, it was important not to “create a Christmas tree” during the strategic planning of the new EU-CA Strategy, but to clearly define a few focus areas.

Overall, the discussions during the keynote speeches, coffee brakes and dinners were crucial for breaking the ice and building trust among the consortium members, many of whom had met for the first time. On the European side, the consortium consists of institutions from Latvia, Poland, United Kingdom, France, Belgium and Germany. On the Central Asian side, partners come from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. They all have the same objective: to make sure that during the course of the coming two years, a profound shift can take place in how academics, decision-makers and civil society members from both regions relate to one another.