

# THE DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS NEW AMBASSADOR TO UZBEKISTAN



His Excellency Mr YURI STERK  
Brussels new man in Tashkent

*The Delegation of the European Union has its office at the International Business Centre at Amir Temur Street, not far from the TV tower. Its new Ambassador just took over the business from his predecessor Norbert Jousten, who left Tashkent in December 2012. Yuri Sterk was born in Bulgaria, studied in Moscow, Paris and Stanford, he carries an Honours Degree in Public International Law from the Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO) and a D.E.A. from the Science Po in Paris.*

*Yuri Sterk has a stunning career, first in his homeland Bulgaria as Director of Human Rights and International Organizations Directorate and Director of NATO and Security Issues Directorate. Soon came the international stage as Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and from 2011 to 2012 Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to the State of Israel. Just turned 50 he was nominated for the position as Ambassador of the European Delegation to Uzbekistan. There is only one diplomat of Bulgaria before, who also became an ambassador of the European Union – the former Prime Minister Filip Dimitrov, currently the EU-Ambassador to Georgia.*

**Q: Your Excellency, welcome to Uzbekistan. You arrived some weeks ago, what were your first impressions of Tashkent?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *Upon my arrival to Tashkent on December 17 last year I was received by freezing minus 13°, the city was ice covered, and in snow. But after a few days here I discovered that the capital of Uzbekistan is an amazing place, where the past, the present and the future meet in a striking way. Behind the contemporary facades of brand new modern buildings, amidst soviet-era "hrushchevki", one may come across an enclave of past ages of exceptional beauty and spirituality, a complex of medieval medressas or mausoleums here and there, a palpable reminder of this country's outstanding cultural and intellectual heritage. And a few blocks away you find yourself in a picturesque oriental bazaar with all its charm and animation!*

*The cold during my first days in the country was less perceptible to me also because of the warm welcome I received in the Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry from counterparts and in particular from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov. I was invited to hand over to Minister Kamilov the copies of my letters of credence only a couple of days after I landed in Tashkent, a fact I appreciated as a token of the high importance the Government of Uzbekistan attaches to the relations with the EU. We had a very positive, friendly exchange of views with the Minister on how to further enhance and deepen the cooperation of the European Union and Uzbekistan. On 14 of January this year I also met Mr. Vladimir Norov, the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, with whom I also had very positive and open talks.*

*We spoke, among other things, about the importance of the EU support for the efforts to strengthen the Rule of law in Uzbekistan and in this connection we stressed the significance of the successful implementation of the "Support to Criminal Judicial Reforms" project.*

**Q: We are curious about the "right stuff" that is needed to represent the EU with its 27 member states and more than 500 million citizens?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *Well, the right stuff is normally twice as big as what you get (he smiles)... Talking about the diplomatic mission of the EU to Uzbekistan - "the EU Delegation" as is the usage to designate EU embassies in non-EU countries, was only recently established in Uzbekistan. It is relatively small in size, but I am sure that with the development of European cooperation with Uzbekistan, the number of staff in the Delegation will grow further. Even this weeks new colleagues are joining the Delegation's team; more are expected to arrive in the course of the next few months.*

**Q: Diplomatic relations between the EU and Uzbekistan are relatively young, they began in April 1996. The first EU-ambassador Norbert Jousten presented his letters of credentials to H.E. Islam Karimov, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 1st of May, 2012. So it is an understandable question what we ask next - The former ambassador staid eight months in Tashkent. What about you, how long will you stay?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *My diplomatic assignment to Tashkent is for 4 years. It is my intention to accomplish my full term here.*

**Q: Talking about politics: What are the main goals of the EU in Uzbekistan?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *As in other countries, we are working on the development of relations with Uzbekistan along several vectors – political, economic, security, social, educational and cultural. Uzbekistan is not far from Europe and has traditional ties with many of our member states. We are building on these to develop stronger relations with the EU as such. There are many areas where the EU and Uzbekistan have common interests and we are working with our interlocutors in the country to better define common objectives and the means of attaining them. And the EU is ready to render practical assistance to Uzbekistan in reaching its own objective of becoming a developed, prosperous and democratic country.*

**Q: How would you assess the relations between EU and Uzbekistan since the moment they have been established?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *Our relations go back to the days of Uzbekistan's independence. Some of our members celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties with Uzbekistan last year and some celebrate it this year. The EU as such has signed partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA) with Uzbekistan in 1996 and this has been the framework for our relations since. While initially the focus has been primarily on development cooperation, the signature of the PCA created space for broadening of bilateral relations by setting up an institutional framework and expanding the scope of areas of relations from development to political affairs, trade and economic issues as well as matters of human and social development and others. Since 2011, the opportunities for advancing bilateral relations have further increased, as the EU and Uzbekistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of energy and the EU established its diplomatic representation in Tashkent. We have regular political consultations with Uzbekistan covering issues of trade and investment, justice, security and home affairs, including our regular human rights dialogue, development cooperation and other issues. We are increasing opportunities for interaction between people in Uzbekistan and Europeans – be it through our academic exchange programs Erasmus Mundus and Tempus or by increasing the numbers of Europeans travelling to Uzbekistan and Uzbeks travelling to Europe. Last year Uzbekistan was visited by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the European Commission*

*Catherine Ashton. I think all of these developments speak for themselves – our relations are moving forward and we continue to actively engage across the board on issues that matter both to Uzbekistan and to the EU.*

**Q: And what is the main added value of the EU-Central Asia Strategy in your relations with Uzbekistan?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *The EU – Central Asia Strategy integrates our relationship with Uzbekistan into a wider regional context. Like in other parts of the world, many issues in Central Asia can be tackled better when bilateral relations are combined with a regional approach. Take the example of border management, transportation, energy or regional security. These and other types of issues can be addressed much more effectively when bilateral ties are complemented with regional approach. This is what the strategy allows us to do. It gives us the opportunity to address issues of regional importance through region-wide political and cooperation initiatives, such as the recently launched EU – Central Asia High Level Security Dialogue. And in some areas the strategy also creates added value by offering space for exchange of experiences related to the conception and implementation of key reforms such as those aimed at the strengthening of the rule of law, democratic development, transition to free market economy and improvement of the investment climate, better protection of the environment etc.*

**Q: In your opinion, why is the project “Support to Criminal Judicial Reforms in Uzbekistan” so important?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *The implementation of this project started in September 2011. It is meant to support the on-going process of reforms in the field of criminal justice, one of the key areas of law-enforcement where sovereign states exercise their jurisdiction; it is of utmost importance that this be done in full respect of the rule of law principle, so that people have confidence in the national institutions dealing with criminal justice. Through this project the EU is assisting the reform process by providing legal expertise on criminal legislation and judicial matters, transfer of knowledge on judicial practice, support to the improvement of access to justice, adoption and implementation of improved human rights standards by the police and the penitentiaries, training of criminal justice professionals and introduction of state-of-the-art information technologies in the relevant state institutions. All of these issues are particularly important for us in Europe and we are keen to provide our expertise and support to those countries that indicate their interest to work on them in their own setting.*

**Q: What do you expect at the end from this project, when it will be closed in August 2014?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *As with any project, donor always expects impact and sustainability of results. The project has been designed together with the Uzbek government as a tool to support its own reform efforts that were launched in 2008. I would hope that when we look back after 2014 we will be able to see concrete positive results in the implementation of the reforms and we will be able to say that the project has made a contribution towards the achievement of such results. I hope that the assistance will allow Uzbekistan to work towards its goal of developing a clear, comprehensive and suitable criminal law framework as well as an efficient, transparent, impartial and modern criminal justice system.*

**Q: Do you have a message for our project?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *Finis coronat opus! - The end crowns the work! In other words, I wish you a successful and timely attainment of all of the project's goals.*

**Q: And a personal question: What are your plans for this year? Professionally & personally?**

**Yuri Sterk:** *I would like to get swiftly up to speed in my newly assumed position and to streamline and enhance the scope of the Delegation's work with a particular focus on our outreach to the young people*

*of Uzbekistan across the country. Personally, I would be happy to enhance my knowledge of Uzbekistan's people, customs, traditions, culture, of its rich historic and cultural heritage, by visiting many interesting places across the country, if my work schedule allows.*

**Mr Ambassador, we thank you for this interview**