



*Delegation to the EU-Kazakhstan, EU-Kyrgyzstan, EU-Uzbekistan and EU-Tajikistan
Parliamentary Cooperation Committees and for relations with Turkmenistan and Mongolia*

20.11.2023

MISSION REPORT

following the 16th EU-Mongolia Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM) in
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 30 October – 1 November 2023

Delegation to the EU-Kazakhstan, EU-Kyrgyzstan, EU-Uzbekistan and EU-
Tajikistan Parliamentary Cooperation Committees and for relations with
Turkmenistan and Mongolia

Members of the mission:

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(PPE) (Leader of the mission)

(PPE)

Introduction

The Delegation for the relations with Central Asia (DCAS) paid a visit to Ulaanbaatar and the Erdene province from Monday, 30 October to Wednesday, 1 November 2023, to hold the 16th EU-Mongolia Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM) and a number of meetings with a variety of interlocutors from different sectors of the Mongolian institutions and society: government, civil rights organizations, education entities, religious actors.

DCAS visit to Mongolia has been part of the regular and frequent contacts with the counterpart, and due to the current exceptional political circumstances, two Inter-Parliamentary Meetings (IPM) took place in 2022: the 14th IPM in Ulaanbaatar in February, and the 15th in Brussels in June.

For a number of unforeseen circumstances that took place before and during the mission, the composition of the Delegation was eventually reduced to two MEPs.

Context

The visit of the European Parliament allowed assessing the political climate of Mongolia at a time of profound distress for its geopolitical location. At the centre of Eurasia, Mongolia is facing an almost unprecedented pressure both from its geography and the ongoing global polarization. Growing tensions between the West and Russia, the critical relations between China and the Asian democracies, not to mention the EU and the USA, are factors shaking the *status quo* and making the region more fragile.

The worrying dynamic of international relationships faced by Mongolia is not the only challenge: trade dependency, impact of climate changes, the preservation of the national identity for the small population of this wide country in such a problematic surrounding, are all elements which were well present during most of the discussions held during the visit. This landscape was reflected in the articulated programme and in the tenure of the exchange of views with the European Parliament's Delegation.

Meetings

With almost no breaks, the EP Delegation managed to have an intense and high-level dialogue with a variety of interlocutors: Parliament (IPM, Speaker, opposition party, the network of female Parliamentarians); Government (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Labour and Social Protection); education institutions (the Mongolian National University and the EU funded vocational training centre in Erdene); civil society (international and Mongolian organisations, religious representatives).

The Delegation paid also a day-trip outside the capital to the Tuv province and to Shuvuu, which allowed a first-hand understanding of the Mongolian society outside Ulaanbaatar.

The variety and the quantity of met interlocutors were combined with the openness of the Mongolian interlocutors in debating a vast variety of topics, which clearly suggested that the consideration of the European Union as “third neighbour” is a concept well established not only in the intuitional narrative but also in the Mongolian society.

The full programme is attached at the end of this report (*see Annex II*).

Mongolian democracy and the transition of its society

Due to the nomadic legacy, as suggested by an NGO representative, and by the democratic apprentice of the nineties, as indicated by a local MP, Mongolians value individual freedom as a core issue of their identity. As confirmed during the meeting with the EP Delegation, the civil society is vibrant and with the media (more than 500 outlets for 3,5 million population) can be very critical to the power. Not only more than 90 international NGOs operate in the country, but thousands of local NGOs are active, all of them with no major restrictions. The Amnesty International, as an example, has about 8.000 members. As stressed by a prominent MP, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, “in this oriental community, where there was no culture of human rights, human rights is now the one issue. People defend them, human rights, more than government protects them. Individual freedom is essential in this country”. Pluralism is ensured not only by the two parties that have so far alternatively ruled, but also by the emergence of new ones for the forthcoming 2024 elections.

Religion, and notably Tibetan Buddhism, play a remarkable role in this effort to establish a space of freedom combined with national identity. As observed at the Gandantegchinlen monastery and temple, the pictures of the Dalai Lama are well present in temples, in spite of the Chinese sanctions - such as closed borders and increased tariffs on imports from Mongolia - which were imposed after his last visit in November 2016.

This aspiration to more freedom also inspired the recent Constitutional reform. The Speaker and various MPs, illustrated the highlights of the reform on the Parliamentary system, with also an increase of female quota and of the number of seats, aimed to give better representation also to rural areas. Although with political tensions, power of clans, and abuse of “donations” to parties to obtain places in electoral competition, the Mongolian democracy looks healthy, and at each meeting, the MEPs were confronted with a variety of individual opinions. Exchanges of views, whether with the Parliament or the Government representatives, took place in a liberal environment, with no pre-packed statements a mutual intellectual curiosity - a striking achievement compared not only to the two neighbours but also to the deterioration of the democratic standard of some Central Asian countries.

However, democratic Mongolia has several challenges to face. As pointed out by the Minister for Labour and Social Protection, the increase of poverty occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic is still impacting the society, the economy needs an urgent diversification, and climate change is seriously hampering agriculture production and living condition of people and livestock. The pollution in Ulaanbaatar - a capital with the presence within its urban perimeter of four coal power plants - provoke serious diseases in the population. The whole green transition proceeds slowly, in spite of great possibilities.

As stressed by one diplomat, and indirectly confirmed also by local interlocutors, Mongolia is a country whose potential is not yet exploited. The lack of use of renewable energies, for instance, is a paradox in a country rich in wind and sun. Cashmere is a valuable export commodity, but traded with limited added value since most of it is sold as raw material - to China and Italy, and very little is processed in the country. Livestock amounts at about 75 million animals, used notably for milk and wool production, while the meat mostly ends wasted since there is no export chain.

The youth of Mongolia, as assessed in the meeting at the University and at the EU funded training centre in Erdene, is skilful, open to the outside world and fast learning. However, access for all to the same level of standard remains a challenge and, as witnessed at the Don Bosco parish, there is a great demand for decentralised assistance to children, young and elder persons, and not only to the ones belonging to more vulnerable sectors of the population.

A challenging neighbourhood

Many policies for further developing the country, would need also a component of regional integration. Nevertheless, this is a challenge for the location of Mongolia, a deadlock, vast a scarcely populated country, and for its neighbours, not in line with the democratic standards of Mongolia.

Unsurprisingly, at almost every single meeting, the EP Delegation faced the paradoxical situation of Mongolia: its strong dependency by the two giant and oppressive neighbors (more than 85% of energy comes from Russia and more than 85% of trade is with China), versus its desire for more relations with the “third neighbors” such as the European Union, South Korea and Japan.

The relations with the two neighbours is characterised by a degree of opacity. One example, as discussed in the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting, as well as in other meetings, is the “Siberia 2” pipeline that should connect Russia and China through Mongolia. While the project is crucial to secure more export of Russian gas and also to provide Mongolia with significant royalties (one interlocutor indicated an approximatively one billion USD per year), China has not given any guarantee and for the time being not much is happening. Furthermore, not very different seems to be the status of a new railway corridor between China, Mongolia and Russia.

The neighbours, and notably Russia, play a role not only in trade and energy issues, but also, directly, in the political life. Some diplomats, echoed by some NGOs, claimed that in the real political life, many candidates for elections have to give “donations” to secure a place in the party list. In some cases, amount of money of those “contributions” could be very relevant and “foreign assistance” may help individual candidates to raise the money, through different entities and with a general lack of transparency. In order to reimburse the financial support, an elected candidate can either choose to pay back the money, or to advocate specific positions in the institution, or a mixture of the two.

In this fragile context, Mongolia is keeping a neutrality line. Ukraine is a good example. During the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting, the European Parliament side made a very strong point about the position of the European Union and its various forms of support to Kiev. The Mongolian side limited itself to deploring the loss of civilians. Likely more than elsewhere, politics are very inter-related with economy: as an examples pointed out in the IPM, China is exploiting mines of cobalt and other raw materials with little attention to sustainability. Mongolia, as explained by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, must consider what is “the best option for our people”, and “how we can safeguard our values”.

The public opinion remains largely hostile to Chinese influence, while sympathy for Russia is still very present. Interestingly, both main parties claim that the other is rather pro-Russia and their own pro-West. Whatever is the kind of political controversy on the positioning of Mongolia in the region, of the feelings towards the neighbours or of their direct or indirect interference, one conclusion could be drawn after the visit of the training centre in Erdene. Funded by the EU, the Czech cooperation, the FAO, South Korea, Russia and China (and with so many donors, the added value of the EU support is somehow diluted), the project is a reference for the entire province of Tuv. Once graduated, some students decide to study further. Most of the ones who do so, although trained with the EU funds, find the best fellowships and opportunities in Chinese Universities; eventually, it looks that it is Beijing which benefits more than other donors and to make the best investment in the new generation.

Relations with the European Union

In such a time of need to both take side and to stress a balanced yet precarious neutrality, all interlocutors, with no exception, expressed the strategic interest of Mongolia to increase all kind of ties with the European Union. The Speaker reiterated his wish to visit soon the European Parliament and mentioned that the “strengthening of the political cooperation with the EU is a top priority”. Several speeches during the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting stressed the need to foster cooperation with the EU or with specific EU Member States in areas such as digitalisation, access to Copernicus, the green transition, (including better legislation on issues such as water management, waste treatment, renewable energies, safe nuclear), mining extraction, full use of GSP+ and support to cashmere processing in Mongolia, diversification of the economy.

The lively meeting at the National University with students, proved how strong the “wish of Europe” is in the young generation. The EU and its Member States are clearly asked to provide far more opportunities in terms of fellowships and academic cooperation. The Minister for Foreign Affairs stated how pleased Mongolia is with the still recent Partnership Cooperation Agreement with the EU, and emphasised that the process has to continue since “there is always room for improving and we’ll do so”. It was acknowledged that it was mainly thanks to the EU that Mongolia had access to reliable vaccines during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Minister also stressed the cooperation with the EU as Member of OSCE and as official NATO Partner. On Gaza and the vote at the UN General Assembly, he diplomatically noted the EU divisions and expressed the wish to have access to information possessed by the EU, so to better coordinate the respective positions.

The Minister for Labour welcomed the concession of the GSP+ status to Mongolia and recognised that some Mongolian companies are unfortunately not yet ready to use such a preferential trade treatment and are not yet ready for the EU market. Bilateral agreements with individual EU Member States play also an important role. Both during the IPM and in the meetings with Ministers, the Mongolia side insisted on the importance of EU Visa facilitation for Mongolians, a request fully endorsed by DCAS Members.

In all meetings, it was clear that the partnership with the EU is based on two pillars: on one side an alliance of values, that can protect Mongolian democracy in such a problematic neighbourhood - a request equally expressed by the Government, the Parliament and the various actors of the civil society met by the European Parliament Delegation. On the other hand, a long list of policy areas where the EU can provide quality and substantial cooperation in several forms: security, coordination in multilateral fora, inter-parliamentary dialogue, market access, better regulation, development cooperation, technologies, people-to-people contacts, etc. With such “impetus” in the willingness to consider the EU as ones of the centres of the Mongolian external policies, the “third neighbourhood” is even too narrow concept in Ulaanbaatar.

Role and follow up by the European Parliament

Relations between the Great Khural and the Mongolian Embassy to the EU, and the European Parliament are characterised by frequent contacts and substantial agenda, as proven also by the Mongolian participants to the EU Visitors Programme. Following the DCAS mission, four points/areas of further cooperation should be pursued:

1. Compared to the roles of Russia and China, Mongolia is a defining country of the degree of the European influence in Central Asia and in the Far East. The European Parliament needs to follow closely the developments of the entire region and the difficult position of Mongolia. This needs to be done from several points of view: security policy, but also energy, climate diplomacy, better use by Mongolia to EU market. Cooperation in the educational fields require special care, because of China investment in training the future leadership of Mongolia.

2. The Mongolian Speaker reiterated his wish for a meeting with European Parliament's President and declared to be available for traveling to Brussels. The visit of such a high institutional personality in Mongolia, would be not only an asset in further fostering the bilateral relations, but also a powerful message to Mongolia's neighbours.
3. Another request of the Great Khural is the establishment of an European Parliament's Delegation in charge exclusively of Mongolia. While this goal seems difficult to achieve, progress has been made in upgrading the IPM format into a full Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, as it is the case for countries enjoying, like Mongolia, a Partnership Cooperation Agreement. The issue is now being agreed by the EEAS and the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in their PCA action plan, following also the 2018 official request by the AFET Committee and DCAS Chairs. DCAS and the counterparts in the Great Khural are in contact to follow-up closely the evolution of this file.
4. Mongolia is not a country of migration to the European Union, where small communities are well integrated in few Member States of the EU - notably Sweden and the Czech Republic. The European Parliament should therefore support Mongolia's wish to obtain Visa facilitation from the EU, which would also be an essential instrument to match the "offer" to Mongolians from their two neighbours.

List of annexes

1. List of participants
2. Final programme of the visit
3. Agenda of the 16th EU-Mongolia Inter-Parliamentary Meeting



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**16th EU-Mongolia
Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM)
Ulaanbaatar
Mongolia**

30 October - 1 November 2023

List of participants

DCAS Members

Mr Tomáš ZDECHOVSKÝ, DCAS Chair

EPP

Czech Republic

Mr Ralf SEEKATZ

EPP

Germany

DCAS Secretariat

2 Staff

Political advisor

1 Staff

Interpreters (EN/MG)

2 Interpreters



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Parliamentary Cooperation Committees and for relations with Turkmenistan and Mongolia*

European Union - Mongolia
16th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM)

30 October–1 November 2023

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

FINAL PROGRAMME

Sunday, 29 October 2023

Individual arrival of Members and transfer to the hotel.

Monday, 30 October 2023

11.00 – 11.30	Briefing meeting with EUDEL
11.40 – 12.30	Meeting with civil society representatives <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open Society Forum2. Women for change3. Youth policy watch4. Amnesty international5. Media council6. International Republican Institute
14.00-14.40	Courtesy call on Chairman of Parliament of Mongolia H.E. Mr Zandanshatar Gombojav
14.40-15.00	State Nine White Banners

15.00-17.30	The 16th Mongolian-European inter-parliamentary (IPM) meeting Mongolian Parliament: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Speaker of Parliament MP Ms Odontuya, • Minister of Digital Development and Communication MP Mr Uchral, • Chair of Standing Committee security and Foreign Policy MP D.Enkh-Amgalan, • Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Legal Affairs MP Mr Ms Mr Tsogtbaatar, • Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ethics MP Mr Battumur • MP Ms Munkhtsetseg, • MP Mr Sukhbaatar
18.30- 20.30	Working Dinner hosted by the Mongolian Parliament

October 31, Tuesday

09.00-09.45	Visit to National History Museum
09.50- 11.20	Meeting with Professors and students of the National University of Mongolia, the School of International Relations and Public Administration of the National University of Mongolia on the topic of "Mongolian-European Union relations and cooperation"
11.30 - 12.30	Meeting with Female Parliamentarians Participants Mongolian side: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Member of Parliament Ms S. Odontuya 2. Member of Parliament Ms Ts. Munkhtsetseg, 3. Member of Parliament Ms P. Anujin, 4. Member of Parliament Ms A. Adiyasuren 5. Mr Davaadash 6. Mr Batbold 7. Mr Mendbayar
<i>12.30 - 13.30</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00 - 14:40	Meeting with State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr N. Ankhbayar
15.00-15.40	Meeting with Minister of Labour and Social Protection Ms Kh. Bulgantuya
16.00-16.45	Meeting with senior representative of the Gandantegchinlen Monastery and visit to the temple
18.30	Working Dinner hosted by the DCAS Chair Mr Tomáš Zdechovský

Wednesday, 1 November

08.00-09.20	Working breakfast meeting with Democratic Party
<i>09.30-12.00</i>	<i>Transfer from Best Western hotel to Erdene sum, Tuv province with a short visit of the Chenggis Khan Complex</i>
12.00-15.00	Visit to the EU funded vocational training centre in Erdene sum, Tuv aimag, meeting and working lunch with Mr. Otgonkhoo, Director and the staff
<i>15:00</i>	<i>Departure to Ulaanbaatar and transfer to Shuvuu</i>
17.30-19.00	Visit to the Salesian Don Bosco Project to assist vulnerable children at the Holy Family Parish in Shuvuu Centre and meeting with Father Jaroslav Vracovsky
<i>19.10</i>	<i>Transfer to the hotel</i>

Thursday, 2 November

09.05 **Departure of the DCAS Delegation Members from "Chinggis Khan" International Airport back to Europe**



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16th EU-Mongolia Inter-Parliamentary Meeting

30 October, 15.00 - 17.30

Ulaanbaatar

AGENDA

Opening of the working session, introductory speeches by:

- **Mrs Ts. Munkhtsetseg, Chair of the Mongolian Parliament Delegation**
- **Mr Tomáš Zdechovský, Chair of the European Parliament Delegation**

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

2. Recent developments in the European Union and in Mongolia including:

- a) Constitutional and political reforms in Mongolia; introduced by the Mongolian side**
- b) Responses to the war in Ukraine and deterioration of global security impact of sanctions; introduced by the EU side**
- c) Political situation in Europe and increase of energy prices; introduced by the EU side**
- d) Empowerment of civil society, human rights dialogue and fundamental freedoms; introduced by the Mongolian side**

3. State of the EU/Mongolian cooperation, with focus on:

- a) Role of the EU and Mongolia in the region and relations with China; introduced either by EU side**
- b) Energy policy, Green and Digital Transitions and connectivity; introduced by the Mongolian side**
- c) Visa facilitation; introduced by EU side**

4. Any other business

- a) Reiterating Mongolia's request to establish a full-fledged Mongolian-EU Inter-parliamentary Cooperation Committee (removal from the EU Central Asia, Turkmenistan and Mongolia Committee)**

5. Date and place of the next meeting