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Report on the Meeting between the OSCE Ministerial Troika and the Asian Partners for Co-operation on the Margins of the Vilnius Ministerial Council

The annual meeting between the OSCE Ministerial Troika and the Asian Partners for Co-operation, with the participation of the OSCE Secretary General and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, took place on 7 December 2011, on the margins of the Vilnius Ministerial Council. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Audronius Ažubalis, Minister of the Foreign Affairs of Lithuania.

Minister Ažubalis praised the high level of co-operation established between the OSCE and the Asian Partners. He noted that the OSCE Partnership for Co-operation had been a priority for the Lithuanian Chairmanship, pointing to the proposed Ministerial Decision on the Partners for Co-operation. Enhancing OSCE engagement with Afghanistan represented another area of highest commitment for Lithuania and negotiations were undergoing on the adoption of a Ministerial Decision on this issue allowing for strengthening co-operation across the three OSCE dimensions of security by launching a second package of projects. He further welcomed Mongolia's application to become a participating State of the OSCE, which represented a clear sign of the continued relevance of the OSCE values and commitments. In conclusion, he thanked Kazakhstan for the able leadership displayed in chairing the Asian Contact Group.

Mr. Zhigalov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, praised the Asian Partners for their commitment and enthusiasm towards the OSCE. Kazakhstan looked forward to lively exchanges and fruitful outcomes of the 2012 OSCE Thailand Conference, as well as of the workshop for sharing experiences on combating illicit crop cultivations to be also hosted by Thailand. He supported the view on the importance on furthering engagement with Afghanistan and welcomed Mongolia's request to become an OSCE participating State, calling upon the OSCE participating States to respond positively. Additionally, he stated that Kazakhstan was convinced that the security of the OSCE area was inextricably linked with security in the region of the Asian Partners and reaffirmed Kazakhstan's commitment to intensify dialogue and co-operation with Asia. He further thanked the Secretary General and the Secretariat for the valuable support and all the Asian Partners for their contributions to the dialogue and co-operation with the OSCE.

All participants expressed their deepest sympathy to Japan, which had been struck by a catastrophic earthquake and the resultant tsunami in March 2011, as well as to Thailand, which

had been hit by the most serious floods in the history of the country. They also expressed their condolences and sorrow after the deadly terrorist attacks in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif on 6 December. They underlined that this demonstrated the need to support Afghanistan in addressing its challenges to achieve peace, stability and prosperity and reiterated their commitment to work together and through the OSCE to this end.

Asian Partners for Co-operation believed that efforts should be redoubled to bridge Asia and Europe, and bring the two continents closer together. They highlighted that the OSCE was in a good position to play an important role in this effort and that the CSCE/OSCE experience was looked at as a source of inspiration by the Partners. OSCE participating States and Partners shared common values, including democracy, human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts and rule of law. However, these principles were not universally held and there were sustained security challenges in Asia and the Pacific. Examples included the totalitarian regime in North Korea, the democratic deficit in China, human rights challenges across Indochina, a military coup in Fiji, a very thinly emerging civilian government in Burma, and remaining challenges in Sri Lanka. Besides, Asia faced significant unresolved territorial disputes, including the North Korean issue, the territorial disputes between China and Japan and the East China Sea, the question of Taiwan, the South China Sea, and, in South Asia, the continued disagreements over territories like Kashmir.

Multilateral co-operation existed in Asia, but had often focused mainly on the economic aspects. However, one Partner noted that with the participation of the USA and Russia this year, the East Asia Summit process had entered into a new phase, which would hopefully bring to an enhanced focus on security aspect. Asia had a great deal to learn from the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and the confidence-building measures that contributed to the peaceful solution of the Cold War in Europe. The ASEAN would also benefit from experiences and lessons learned from the OSCE, as the ASEAN strived to become an ASEAN Community by 2015. On the other hand, the OSCE could benefit from experience and lessons learned from the ASEAN, which had in the past been the key to the maintenance of peace and stability in South-east Asia. Additionally, the six-party talks could eventually become something similar to a CSCE/OSCE type of process in North-East Asia. What would happen to the Asian region would inevitably have a great impact on the peace and stability throughout the OSCE.

Partners recognized that the two pillars of the relationship between the OSCE and its Partners for Co-operation were the continuous dialogue and the joint projects. Several Partners suggested involving academics to discuss the future of the relationship between OSCE and the Asia-pacific region, as two regions closely interconnected, in terms of economy and security.

The Asian Partners for Co-operation fully supported the efforts of Mongolia to become a full member of the OSCE, and encouraged all participating States of the OSCE to back Mongolia's application. They also hoped that a Decision on Partners for Co-operation would be adopted later in the day at the Ministerial meeting, and promised to actively engage in its implementation.

Additionally, the Asian Partners for Co-operation expressed their support to the OSCE-Thailand Conference to be held in Chiang Mai on 13-14 February 2012. The conference would provide a good opportunity for sharing experiences on issues of mutual interest such as enhancement of

regional security, confidence-building measures, strengthening of regional security, sustainable energy and transport linkages and the promotion of human rights.

The Secretary General supported the Asian Partners' views that relations and exchanges among regional organizations should be enhanced. He also stated his full support to the idea of creating academic networks to foster a stronger and deeper interaction. He briefed about the Conferences on Afghanistan he had attended in Istanbul and Bonn, and expressed hopes that the Ministerial Council would adopt the Decision on Afghanistan later in the day, referring to the second package of projects which would expand the co-operation with Afghanistan. Additionally, he stressed that the interest of Mongolia in becoming a member of the OSCE honored the Organization recognizing its value.

The representative of the Parliamentary Assembly emphasized that parliamentarians attached a great importance to the co-operation with the OSCE Partners, which was seen as a two-way street. He noted that the idea of academic networks had the full support of President Efthymiou. Regarding the application of Mongolia to become a participating State of the OSCE, the Special Representative reported that parliamentarians had not had the chance so far to discuss it in the OSCE PA decision making process, but he added that the members seemed very positive towards this idea.

The Irish incoming OSCE Chairmanship stated its commitment to further developing and building the co-operation with the Asian Partners and reiterated its strong support to Mongolia's application to become a participating State.