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EU statement in response to the report by the ODIHR Director, Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, on the activities of the ODIHR election support team to Afghanistan

The EU warmly welcomes Ambassador Lenarčič back to the Permanent Council and would like to thank him for his informative report on the activities of the ODIHR election support team to Afghanistan earlier this year.

We would also like to thank Mr Nordbø and his dedicated team for their highly professional work, which they have carried out in an extremely difficult - and often dangerous - environment.

The EU has followed the electoral process in Afghanistan closely, and the EU Election Observation Mission has played a key role in providing an independent and impartial assessment of these elections. The EU has taken active part in the international support to Afghanistan and expressed its view on the elections in several declarations since August this year.

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The EU supported the ODIHR's mandate to send an election support team to Afghanistan as tasked by PC Decision 891 of 2 April this year, being convinced of the value added to the joint international effort by the ODIHR's involvement. Several EU Member States have directly supported this ODIHR undertaking through the provision of extrabudgetary financial support.

Today, we would like to commend the ODIHR for its continuous contribution to strengthening the democratic framework in Afghanistan and thank it for its efficient co-operation with the EU Observation Mission and other international actors in the field.

The EU encourages Afghanistan, as an OSCE Partner for Co-operation, to take the opportunity now to review its election system, aiming for improvements ahead of the elections planned for next year, and to take measures to implement the realistic and concrete recommendations set out in the ODIHR's report, in order to improve its legal framework and processes as laid out in the above-mentioned PC Decision.

Finally, let me wish Ambassador Lenarčič and his dedicated staff at the ODIHR much success in their future endeavours to enhance democratic standards and in their various other activities.

The candidate countries CROATIA* and the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and

NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.