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OSCE engagement in Central Asia and Afghanistan

In recent years the European Union (EU) has paid increased attention to Central Asia and a Central Asian strategy was adopted under the German EU Presidency in June 2007. After a year of collecting and identifying projects it is now time for implementation to begin, and I am confident that the French EU Presidency will take meaningful steps in this area.

Many of the core elements of the strategy, in particular education, the rule of law, water management, border security and human rights, overlap with the activities of the OSCE. The strategy explicitly calls for close co-operation between the EU and the OSCE. For years now, the OSCE has been present through its missions in all five Central Asian States and has considerable experience in project implementation. The point is to exploit this know-how; the EU and the OSCE should pool their efforts and draw on their respective areas of competence. Regional co-operation must also be promoted in Central Asia. To that end, contacts should also be developed with regional organizations such as the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO).

I should like to expand on this, using as an example the question of border management in the Central Asian States. There is enough work here for all the international actors involved. Both the EU's Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and Drug Action Programme in Central Asia (CADAP) along with the OSCE's border management programme are making a valuable contribution to border security in all the Central Asian States. The focus here is the 1,300 km long border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. A considerable proportion of the heroin produced in Afghanistan is smuggled into Russia and Europe across this border. The OSCE is currently preparing, for the first time, a national border strategy for Tajikistan, which is to serve as the basis for the implementation of further specific measures.

Germany is ready to play a greater role in Central Asian border management and to make a substantial contribution to a project within the framework of the OSCE Border Management and Security Concept (BMSC), a project that envisages the setting up of customs control points at the Kulma Pass on the border between China and Tajikistan. The aim is to prevent the continued smuggling into Afghanistan of large quantities of precursor chemicals needed for the production of heroin. In addition, Germany will organize, in

co-operation with the OSCE, the European Commission, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Finland and France, a ministerial conference in Dushanbe in October of this year on border management and drug control in Central Asia, which is intended to encourage greater co-operation and assignment of areas of responsibility among the various actors.

We are in favour of a greater involvement of Afghanistan in OSCE projects in Central Asia, as called for in Ministerial Decision No. 4/07. The package put forward by the Secretary General containing a total of 16 individual projects represents an important step in the right direction. It would not be in keeping either with our own interests in Central Asia or with the interests and expectations of the Central Asian countries themselves were we to regard the OSCE's involvement in the region exclusively in terms of our common interests in Afghanistan. Central Asia is of such great strategic importance for Europe that a one-sided view of this kind would not be justified. It could result in a loss of confidence in the EU by our Central Asian partners.

Accordingly, we see the potential advantage to Afghanistan of an OSCE involvement primarily as a result of a seriously intended engagement by the Organization in Central Asia. This must take place with the consent of the host countries and must be based on a realistic assessment of their capabilities. Problems that have arisen in co-operation in the past must be taken into account. This would provide a solid basis for long-term regional engagement in Central Asia, which ultimately will also help to promote the stabilization of Afghanistan.

I am also unwilling to rule out in advance the possibility of OSCE involvement in Afghanistan if we are convinced that such involvement could bring advantages. One example might be the possibility of assistance in conducting the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled in Afghanistan for 2009 and 2010 — an area in which the OSCE undoubtedly has more relevant expertise than any other international organization.