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EU statement on Working Session IV - Afghanistan

We welcome the opportunity today, for the first time in the ASRC, to have a session devoted to Afghanistan. This demonstrates the importance given to this topic by the OSCE as a part of the international community's effort to promote and strengthen engagement with Afghanistan.

The EU has repeatedly highlighted the importance of Afghanistan's long-term security and stability, not only for the country itself but also its impact on the region as a whole. We remain fully committed to the process of transformation beyond 2014, following the drawdown of ISAF forces from the country. Our overall strategy in Afghanistan remains to assist the Afghan government and people to be able to run their own country. International engagement in Afghanistan has steadily evolved from security stabilisation towards political and economic cooperation. The initial military action has been gradually supplemented by political, civilian and judicial efforts to reinforce democracy, build up the country's capacities, create stability and economic development, improve living conditions and ensure respect for human rights. A clear manifestation of our commitment to an enduring engagement beyond 2014 is the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. This agreement will create for the first time a coherent, legally binding framework for EU relations with Afghanistan.

The success of our respective efforts in support of Afghanistan depends on our capacity to build strategic partnerships and strategic coordination and co-operation among international actors, while fully respecting Afghan ownership of the whole process. We also acknowledge the central role of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Our endeavours have been reinforced by a series of international conferences on Afghanistan as well as by commitments endorsed by the NATO summit in Chicago. The partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community has repeatedly reaffirmed the goal of long-term security, economic growth and development.

Despite the clear progress achieved by Afghanistan during the last decade, many challenges lie ahead. In the immediate future, our focus is on the upcoming series of elections. The adoption of a sound legal electoral framework consistent with the Constitution, with credible measures to prevent fraud, overseen by independent bodies, and agreed by all political actors and civil society, has been recognised by the international community as one of the key priorities for a safe and sustainable Afghanistan. The conduct of the elections may have an impact on the level of further engagement of the international community in the country. It is therefore vital that the elections are credible, conducted in a transparent way and are accepted by the majority of Afghans. The EU reiterates the importance of women's participation in the electoral process and in this context the need for the full implementation of UNSC resolution 1325.

The EU stands ready to back UNAMA in fulfilling its mandate to support election preparations. Building on the experience of previous years in which ODIHR deployed Election Support Teams and made recommendations regarding the electoral process in Afghanistan, we could support a new request from Afghanistan for an Election Support Team to be deployed by ODIHR for the 2014 Presidential and Provincial Council elections.

The security of Afghanistan is indivisible from sustainable security in the whole region of Central Asia, which in turn has a key role to play in ensuring a secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan. We therefore support regional cooperation in Central Asia where the OSCE, with its comprehensive approach to security, can be of assistance. The initiative in advancing a set of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to enhance cooperation and trust in the Central Asia region within the Istanbul Process (Heart of Asia Process) represents a sound example of such a regional cooperation. Both the EU and the OSCE have become a part of this Process and have pledged to further promote CBMs relating to counter terrorism, counter narcotics and education in case of the OSCE, and to disaster management, trade, commerce and investment opportunities and counter-narcotics in case of the EU.

Apart from the OSCE's active role in regional initiatives, the EU highly values OSCE efforts to contribute to stability and security in the region through specific

projects with Afghanistan. While we regret the absence of consensus on organising project activities in Afghanistan itself, we welcome the progress made to date on implementing the 2007 Ministerial Council Decision and more recently the decision agreed at the 2011 Vilnius Ministerial which has brought a fresh impetus to the OSCE's work.

The projects elaborated as a result of this decision expand the scope of OSCE activities across all three dimensions of the Organisation's work. They cover issues ranging from border management, economic and environmental issues, and countering narcotics to good governance, rights of women and children, freedom of the media, promotion of human rights and improvement of Afghanistan's electoral process. Some of these projects have been carried out thanks to the generous sponsorship of participating States, part of them have been realised by the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, but more financial support is needed.

The EU therefore encourages all participating States to consider contributing to the implementation of these activities, which would allow us to fulfil our joint goals. We also encourage the Secretariat, in close co-operation with the relevant field presences in Central Asia, to continue to identify and develop meaningful OSCE extra-budgetary projects.

The Acceding Country CROATIA*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of MOLDOVA, and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.