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INTERVENTION BY

H.E. AMBASSADOR AYOOB ERFANI

AT THE 985TH PERMANENT COUNCIL MEETING

OF THE

ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)

IN RESPONSE TO

**THE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE CABINET OF
MINISTERS AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TURKMENISTAN,**

H.E. RASHID MEREDOV

27 FEBRUARY 2014

Hofburg, Vienna

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Ayoob Erfani at the 985th OSCE Permanent Council Meeting in response to Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, H.E. Rashid Meredov

27 February 2014

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Swiss Chairmanship for facilitating today's meeting.

I wish to join previous speakers in welcoming H.E. Minister Rashid Meredov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of our brotherly country, Turkmenistan and would like to thank him for his comprehensive presentation.

In the last years, during which my country, supported by its partners in the international community, has been slowly but steadily recovering from the past decades of imposed violence and instability, fruitful and friendly relations with Turkmenistan have blossomed. Afghanistan and Turkmenistan are currently working closely, including through exchange of high level delegations between Ashgabat and Kabul, to seize every opportunity to further strengthen our countries relationship by fostering a continuous bilateral dialogue and enhancing mutually beneficial projects and initiatives.

Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, having common cultures and traditions, share an 800 kilometer border and our neighborly relationship serves as a strong facilitator for deepening co-operation between our two countries in a wide range of areas. Given the unstable and severe situation with which Afghanistan has been coping with for the past three decades, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have proved to co-operate willingly, sincerely and effectively in order to eradicate every source of instability from the region. Turkmenistan has played an exemplary role and has proved to be a very good neighbor in actively contributing to the stabilization and development process in Afghanistan. Afghan officials and civil servants have been trained in Ashgabat, the Turkmen railway lines have been extended to northern Afghanistan and the immediate energy and power needs of my country have been rapidly and generously supplied by Turkmenistan.

Allow me to provide some additional examples of this long-term friendship, which has been enthusiastically developed by both sides in the name of security-oriented and export-driven regional co-operation. In May 2011, the President of Afghanistan, H.E Hamid Karzai and a delegation of high-ranking Afghan officials, visited Turkmenistan. During this trip, a Memorandum of Understanding concerning the two countries' co-operation and friendship was signed, covering various and diverse areas such as education, media, culture, arts and tourism.

In October 2012, the Ministers of Water and Energy of Turkmenistan visited Kabul in order to further the relations between our two capitals. Our proximity to one another explains much of the interdependence that our countries have on one another when it comes to issues like the energy sector. Turkmenistan, which has the fourth largest gas reserve in the world, is one of the main countries that supplies electricity to Afghanistan, with 70 km of electricity supply lines providing electricity from Turkmenistan to Ankhowy, Sheberghan and Mazar-e-Sharif. Aside from electricity, we collaborate over gas supplies, as a significant amount of gas required by Afghanistan is provided by our friendly neighbor. Turkmenistan also provides access to many sectors that would be rather difficult for Afghanistan to tackle alone. Through bilateral and multilateral agreements, the two nations act as a strong support and facilitation network. We appreciate Turkmenistan's support for our initiative on the Black Sea Corridor also known as Northern Corridor, which would connect Afghanistan to the Black Sea through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghanistan, strongly supporting regional co-operation and respecting shared principles of coexistence and good neighborly relations, has tried its best to serve as a safe crossroads for Turkmenistan and for our other neighbors and countries of the region, including Iran and Pakistan. In this atmosphere of excellent neighborly relations and friendship, the three leaders of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the construction of the joint Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway project. This will increase investments and trade volume among our countries in the region. The long-term implication is renewed importance of Afghanistan as a transit country. As a consequence, greater economic integration will contribute to enhanced regional security and will enable our peoples to fully realize their aspirations.

We are most grateful for the fruitful partnership that Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have fostered over the years and we look forward to the continued support and growth of our partnership. To reach a sustainable peaceful solution in the country, Afghanistan initiated the political process, which will remain an important element of transition. We appreciate the good will of Turkmenistan in supporting the ongoing Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process which includes anti-government groups ready to renounce violence, denounce terrorism, and accept the constitution of Afghanistan, in particular the rights of women and children as well as willing to play a constructive role in the ongoing political and stabilization process in the country.

Afghanistan will continue to concentrate on restoring its historic role as a land-bridge, energy hub, and trade route connecting our immediate neighbors and regional partners. We firmly believe that regional connectivity and economic integration are among the fundamental drivers of our long-term regional security and shared economic prosperity. The post-2014 Afghanistan is committed to providing opportunities for connectivity and prosperity in our region, and we consider the role of our immediate neighbors from OSCE participating countries, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, essential to this purpose.

In conclusion, I warmly welcome you Minister again in today's meeting, and wish you a bright and prosperous future and every success in your service for your country.

Thank you