



Statement by H.E. Ambassador Azizullah Karzai,
Head of the delegation of Afghanistan,
At the Plenary Session 1: Transport development to enhance regional
economic co-operation and stability; the special case of landlocked
countries,
Fourteenth OSCE Economic Forum,
Prague 22-24 May 2006.

Thank you Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, dear colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in the this very timely meeting, more so as it focuses on the development of regional transportation, to which Afghanistan, as a OSCE Partner for co-operation, attaches great importance.

In my view, the OSCE renewed attention to the transit and transport problems is a very relevant question, as the promotion of regional economic co-operation and stability are deeply interconnected. This issue is particularly important for the economic integration and security of the Central Asia region, of which Afghanistan is at the heart.

The implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, addressing the special needs of the landlocked countries, as well as various regional arrangements, would be vital for long-term stability and prosperity of the region. This is the area where the support and contribution of the international community, including the OSCE, are much needed.

Currently, some donor states and international financial institutions together with states in the region are implementing different projects which are essential for harmonizing and developing transit transportation roads and removing obstacles for transit trade through bilateral and regional agreements.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghanistan is strongly committed to the promotion of transportation and to economic integration of the region, and this is a very high priority for us. Being at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and between Central and Southern Asia, Afghanistan is able and willing to make meaningful contribution to this respect. We believe that for the reinforcement of stability and development integration in the Central Asia region, consolidated efforts in the promotion of regional transit trade, energy and development of regional transportation infrastructure are precondition.

We have close historical and economic linkages with our Central Asian neighbors. Once, Central Asia, including Afghanistan, stood at the very center of the world economy, as the Silk Road was the main trade link between the East and West. We expect that with the international community's help to restore these transit links, especially roads, Afghanistan will re-emerge as an important hub for trade and the economies of Central and South Asia will continue to grow and will be further integrated into the global economy. Afghanistan offers the quickest and cheapest route and it will play a role of "land bridge" and "window to the sea" for all its neighbors.

Once our road network is ready, the travel time to a warm water port will be dramatically reduced and, consequently, every Central Asian capital will be away 32 hours maximum from the Gulf. Afghanistan is already a transit country between Central Asia and South Asia. Wide-region cooperation will allow reconnecting Afghanistan with the outside world, restoring the infrastructure and communication between Central Asia and South Asia as well as ensuring the supply of energy resources to the growing economies of South Asia.

We believe that economic interdependence is a win-win situation and without trade and investment, security matters can not be resolved. When the economy revives, security also improves and it is circle, one depends on another.

It is worth mentioning that some crucial steps towards the renewal of regional transport have already been taken, but there is still a lot to be done.

Mr. Chairman,

It is the policy of the Government of Afghanistan to take into account not only its own requirements but also those of our Central Asia neighboring

states in order to further regional economic integration. This is the area where the financial assistance of the international community will continue to be critically important.

And, of course, efforts to improve access to important transport routes in the region are crucial for facilitating trade. My government aspires to have open, economically vital transportation routes linking the region, thereby minimizing the transportation costs incurred in moving goods across borders. Region-wide transport will enable Afghan farmers to deliver their products such as dried fruits to world markets, thus, creating alternatives to the opium-economy. This will create millions of jobs and will provide major revenues in the form of tariffs and taxes.

We strongly believe that the OSCE contribution in the promotion of regional transportation will be very productive and it will certainly enhance human security and stability in the OSCE region and beyond. Afghanistan will spare no effort for our common aspiration: to develop mutually beneficial ties for regional economic cooperation.

I thank you for your attention.