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- Council conclusions (12 May 2016)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Afghanistan, as adopted by the Council at its 3462nd meeting held on 12 May 2016.

Council conclusions on Afghanistan

1. The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, 'Partnership for Prosperity and Peace', on 4-5 October 2016 will take place at a critical juncture. It will provide an important opportunity for the Afghan National Unity Government ("the Afghan Government") to reconfirm its commitments towards continued reforms and progress through the Afghan Realising Self-Reliance agenda and for the international community to take stock of progress achieved over the last years. The NATO Warsaw Summit and the Brussels Conference will together allow the international community, on the basis of reinforced mutual commitments with the Afghan Government, to signal sustained political and financial support to Afghan peace, state-building, and development.
2. The Council recalls the collective responsibility of the Afghan Government to demonstrate a clear commitment to political and economic reforms, including the electoral framework and its institutions. Clear and tangible steps towards electoral reform will help strengthen public confidence in the democratic process, particularly in view of the upcoming elections. The Council is concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation, as highlighted by UNAMA, and also recalls the importance of respecting international humanitarian law. It supports all efforts to facilitate an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process as well as to promote reconciliation at national and regional level. The EU remains committed to supporting civilian policing in Afghanistan beyond the completion of the EUPOL mission in 2016. Progress achieved by Afghanistan in the respect, protection and promotion of human rights, and in particular women's and children's rights, must be consolidated and further improved and mainstreamed in all government activities. It is for the Afghan Government, with the continued support of international and regional partners, to maintain the momentum for reform, to make progress towards Afghan Self-Reliance and peace.

3. The Council underlines the need for the Afghan people, especially the youth, to be able to see a viable future in Afghanistan. In this regard, the capacity of Afghanistan's institutions to address the population's basic needs and to reduce poverty will be a determining factor. This will require the Afghan Government to promote sustainable economic, social and environmental development, including sustained job creation for women and men alike, while further improving governance, tackling drug production and trafficking, as well as building up fiscal sustainability. Corruption in particular is a critical challenge for development in Afghanistan, and the adoption and implementation of effective anti-corruption measures is of paramount importance. A stable political and economic environment will help consolidate Afghanistan's nascent democratic institutions and the establishment of a reliable rule of law framework with safeguards to respect, protect and promote human rights, and in particular women's and children's rights.

4. Substantial, cooperative efforts will also be necessary to address large population movements and the issue of irregular migration. They represent a severe constraint for the development of the Afghan society and economy, as well as a pressing challenge to the region, transit states, and the EU. The Council strongly encourages further efforts by the Afghan Government to provide a conducive environment that can offer Afghan citizens opportunities within the country. The Council calls on the efforts of the Afghan Government, the High Representative and the European Commission to develop a framework for cooperation through the High Level Dialogue on Migration scheduled for June and October 2016, in co-operation with Member States. In this framework, which should also support bilateral initiatives, return as well as readmission and reintegration by the Afghan Government of its nationals, in full respect of their fundamental rights and in accordance with international commitments, will be important elements to agree on. The Council welcomes the policy "Sustaining Self-Reliance: A Strategy for Reducing Informal Out-Migration and Re-integrating the People Who Have Left" adopted by the Afghan Cabinet on 9 December 2015.

5. The Council welcomes the presentation of the outline of the new Afghan National Development Framework and looks forward to the revised National Priority Programmes. We expect these policy documents to reveal in full the Afghan government's vision for reforms in key areas such as basic service delivery, women's empowerment and infrastructure development. Before the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the Afghan Government and its international partners will have agreed on the best way to refresh the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework for the coming years of the transformation decade.

6. The Council welcomes the progress achieved by the Afghan Government on the path of reform which was presented at the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) meeting on 4 April 2016. These reforms are being pursued within a challenging environment, and the Government's reform progress has not always been as strong as expected. However, the Council notes the positive turnaround on revenues, the demonstrated commitment to financial sector reforms under the International Monetary Fund's Staff-Monitored Program, the approval of Afghanistan's WTO membership terms, the adoption of an anti-harassment regulation protecting women in the public sector, and the launch of the Jobs for Peace Programme. These achievements represent an encouraging signal of the capacity of the Afghan government to deliver on its reform commitments, which must now be followed by further tangible progress.

7. The Council recalls the aim to maintain a high level of EU development assistance for Afghanistan with EUR 200 million per year until 2020. The Council recognizes the need to take account of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in its future partnership with Afghanistan. In line with its commitments under the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the EU is working with the Afghan Government and its partners to deliver aid in a more effective and flexible way, and to promote a high degree of Afghan ownership through increased use of in-country systems. Subject to adequate transparency and accountability mechanisms, a State-Building Contract (SBC) for Afghanistan is currently being considered, based on a specific request by the Afghan Government and supported by the World Bank's recommendation to increase 'on-budget' assistance. The EU will seek increasing aid efficiency further, by assessing with Member States a Joint Programming approach, recognising that this must be voluntary, flexible, inclusive and tailored to the country context. Combined with successful implementation by the Afghan government of reforms towards self-reliance in line with its commitments, the EU and its Member States intend to maintain the necessary political support and financial assistance at or near current levels until 2020 and encourage other international donors and regional partners also to provide political and financial support.
