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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

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To: Delegations

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Subject: Afghanistan
- Council conclusions (18 July 2016)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Afghanistan, as adopted by the Council at its 3482nd meeting held on 18 July 2016.

Council conclusions on Afghanistan

1. The Council endorses the second annual implementation report of the "European Union Afghanistan Strategy: 2014-16" (cf. annex). Three years of improved EU coordination have shown results on which EU and Member States' engagement in Afghanistan will continue to build. The progress achieved has been visible in many areas, but it has been uneven and remains fragile. The ongoing fragility warrants a realistic approach for the longer-term, and sustained assistance of the international community, based on the principles of mutual accountability.
2. The Council concludes that, in the coming years, the EU and MS' overarching strategic goal should remain the development of Afghan institutions to safeguard progress to date and to further progress in the development of a more effective and ultimately sustainable Afghan state. The key objectives of the current Strategy should be renewed, namely to promote security; reinforce democracy; encourage economic and human development ; strengthen the rule of law, including the fight against corruption, and the protection and promotion of human rights in particular the rights of women, including in the context of the peace process and continue the fight against the narcotic and drug industry. The Strategy should take into account the regional dimension and maintain the flexibility to respond appropriately to potential changes in Afghanistan. Furthermore, as migration has become a priority for the EU in its overall relations with Afghanistan, the EU's actions should help address the root causes of Afghan irregular migration.

3. Based on this guidance, the Council would welcome a follow-up to the current "European Union Afghanistan Strategy: 2014-16". The new strategy for the period 2017-20 should respond to the envisaged Afghan National Peace and Development Framework as well as the related Afghan National Priority Programmes – to be endorsed at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (BCA). The strategy should encompass a comprehensive approach and the mutual commitments identified in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework and the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. It should focus on concrete results and include an implementation plan that specifies deliverable outcomes and a clear, coordinated division of labour amongst the EU and Member States, in a multi-donor framework. It should explore possibilities of moving towards a Joint Programming scheme amongst interested European contributors. The Council would welcome having the new strategy ready for endorsement by the first quarter of 2017.
4. The EU urges the Afghan Government to cooperate on the return and readmission of its nationals, in full respect of their human rights and in accordance with international obligations and commitments. This is the central and essential element of the Joint Way Forward, which addresses the growing pressure of irregular migration in parallel to Member States' initiatives and agreements aimed at achieving further cooperation on readmission. The EU would support this through reintegration assistance, to help create a conducive environment that can offer Afghan citizens opportunities within the country.
5. The EU welcomes the commitments made in support of sufficient and increasingly sustainable Afghan National Defense and Security Forces as endorsed by Afghanistan and contributing countries of the Resolute Support Mission at the NATO Warsaw Summit on 8/9 July 2016.

6. Recalling the Council conclusions of 12 May 2016, the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, scheduled for 4/5 October and co-hosted by the EU and the Afghan Government, is expected to focus on
- substantial progress in Afghan state and institution building through implementation of the reform agenda of the National Unity Government and concrete new commitments for the coming years defined in an updated Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework;
 - international support in view of sustained funding at or near the current levels until 2020, and increasing aid effectiveness in response to the new Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and our lasting security partnership;
 - regional support for a political process towards peace and reinforced cross-border economic cooperation.
7. The EU underlines that security and sustainable development represent interconnected challenges in a state-building process which needs to be underpinned by genuine political support within the region. A secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is vital to the peace and stability of the region as a whole. The EU urges all regional stakeholders to cooperate actively in order to promote a genuine and results-oriented negotiation process aimed at creating a lasting settlement between the parties to the conflict that will provide the foundation for peace, security and prosperity both in Afghanistan and the wider region.

8. The EU welcomes and encourages coordinated efforts to support the Afghan Government in promoting a meaningful, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, which is the only viable path towards a sustainable resolution of the conflict. The EU welcomes the initiatives to create a conducive environment for such a process. Ending armed conflict in Afghanistan is urgent and in the interest of all who seek development and stability. The EU recalls the principles that constitute an integral component of stability in the region and beyond:
- (i) The sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan;
 - (ii) the inclusive character of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace talks, representing all citizens of Afghanistan and their legitimate interests, including adequate representation of women;
 - (iii) the renunciation of violence and of ties to international terrorism; and
 - (iv) the respect for the Afghan Constitution, including its human rights provisions, notably the rights of women and children.

The outcome of such a process should be respected and supported by all regional actors and the broader international community.

9. The EU urges Afghan authorities to ensure the necessary electoral reforms, notably in establishing a calendar for parliamentary elections. Inclusive and transparent elections, which reflect the genuine will of the Afghan people should lead to greater political stability, and strengthen sustainable democracy. To this end, rebuilding trust and confidence in the electoral reform process is of utmost importance.

10. The Council welcomes the holding of the 2nd local Afghanistan-EU Human Rights Dialogue in Kabul on 1 June 2016, which underlined the Afghan government's continued commitment to improve the human rights situation, notably in view of implementing the National Action Plan on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. A number of concrete commitments have been made, including as regards the implementation of the Elimination of Violence Against Women law, which could become part of the revised annex to the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework.
11. The Council remains concerned by the humanitarian situation and recalls the importance of respecting international humanitarian law.
12. The EU remains committed to support Afghan efforts in strengthening civilian policing beyond the envisaged completion of the police mission EUPOL AFGHANISTAN in 2016.
13. The Council expresses its intention to move towards signature of the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development in time for the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan.
