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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

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Subject: Afghanistan
- Council conclusions (19 November 2018)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Afghanistan, as adopted by the Council at its 3252nd meeting held on 19 November 2018.

Council conclusions on Afghanistan

General

1. Recalling the 2017 EU Strategy, and the Council Conclusions of October 2017, the Council reaffirms its long-term commitment to support the people of Afghanistan in their path towards peace, security and prosperity. The EU sees a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as a cornerstone for the stability and development of the entire region. The Council welcomes the provisional application of the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development (CAPD) as an important step in bilateral relations between the EU and Afghanistan.
2. The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan on 27-28 November 2018 will be an important opportunity to take stock of progress on mutually agreed reforms made since the Brussels Conference in 2016 and set a forward-looking agenda for peace, stability and sustainable development. The EU commends UN agencies and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan on its commitment to achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan.
3. Recalling the Council Conclusions of 15 October 2018 on the EU Strategy for Connecting Europe and Asia, the EU supports political dialogue and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries and the wider region, including Central Asian countries, through the establishment of networks and partnerships that develop sustainable connectivity. Progress in regional economic cooperation and connectivity projects will bring tangible benefits to the people of Afghanistan and reinforce current peace efforts.

Promoting peace, stability and regional security

4. The Council welcomes the growing consensus among key Afghan, regional and international stakeholders on the parameters of a potential peace process. The EU supports an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, with the Government and the Taliban at its core, as the only viable path towards a sustainable resolution of the armed conflict. To be successful, such a process shall lead to the renunciation of violence, the severing of all ties to international terrorism, the adherence to the rule of law and the full respect for the human rights of all Afghans
5. The Council urges all parties to the conflict, in particular the Taliban, to enter into formal peace negotiations. The EU welcomes the Government of Afghanistan's recent initiatives such as the offer of talks without preconditions, and the temporary ceasefire during this year's Eid al-Fitr holiday, which was partially reciprocated by the Taliban. Local reactions to the ceasefire demonstrate that the people of Afghanistan overwhelmingly yearn for peace and are ready to reconcile with each other. The EU regrets that the level of violence has continued unabated as the Taliban did not honour the Government's extension of the Eid al-Fitr truce, and rejected a further ceasefire offer.
6. Deploring the rising number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, the EU condemns all attacks on civilians and civilian facilities, including schools, religious and voting centres, and recalls the responsibility of all parties to protect civilians in accordance with their obligations pursuant to International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law. The EU calls for the timely investigation of all cases of killings of civilians in independent and transparent proceedings.

7. The Council urges all neighbouring countries and regional actors to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to promote peace and stability and welcomes initiatives such as the Tashkent International Conference, hosted by Uzbekistan in March, which complement Afghanistan's own efforts. The EU will continue to support peace and long-term stability through its engagement with regional partners and key international stakeholders, and supports the important role played by the Special Envoy of the EU for Afghanistan in this regard. The EU encourages further regional economic integration, including through the development of Afghanistan's links with Central Asia, as an important contribution to sustainable development.
8. The EU welcomes the joint statement between the Government of Afghanistan and NATO at the Brussels Summit of July 2018 to continue Resolute Support's efforts in support of sufficient and increasingly sustainable Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, the extension of financial sustainment of the Afghan forces through 2024, and the Government of Afghanistan's related commitments.
9. The EU urges all countries to respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan. Afghanistan must never again be allowed to become an arena for proxy warfare by foreign actors. In this context, the EU calls on neighbouring countries to redouble efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, and to eliminate safe havens for terrorist networks, fully respecting their obligations under international law, including international human rights law.
10. The EU encourages all international initiatives to support peace in Afghanistan to ensure coordination with the Government under the overarching umbrella of the Kabul Process, to maximise the prospects of a peaceful political settlement.

Reinforcing democracy, rule of law and human rights and promoting good governance and women's empowerment

11. The October 2018 parliamentary elections, the first to be Afghan-led and Afghan-run since 2001, have shown a strong desire, as well as courage and resilience by the population, including women and youth, to participate in the democratic process. The EU commends the security forces for the sacrifices made which helped to enable elections to happen. The Council condemns the violence that marred these elections, in particular the attacks perpetrated on electoral operations. The criminal and ruthless attacks on civilians and officials by the Taliban and other terrorist and insurgent groups, during the electoral campaign are unjustifiable. The Council expresses its condolences to, and solidarity with, all the victims and their families. Despite commendable electoral reforms adopted since the previous elections, the polling was negatively affected by substantial organisational and technical difficulties as well as suspicions of large-scale fraud. It is now urgent to identify and implement strong and swift measures that will preserve the safety, transparency, accountability and credibility of the ballot. This is also of crucial importance for the 2019 Presidential elections, for which the EU expect political parties and stakeholders, including the Government of Afghanistan and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), to support the democratic process and to constructively contribute to political stability. The Council underlines the need for further efforts in this regard and reiterates its support for an inclusive political process.

12. Through political and financial support, the EU remains committed to on-going efforts to promote and protect human rights in Afghanistan. The EU acknowledges the steps taken by the Government in this regard, namely through the adoption of the new Penal Code, anti-torture legislation and legislation on elimination of violence against women. However, serious human rights challenges remain and further efforts are required in order to ensure full respect for human rights, in particular strengthening the effective implementation of policy and legislation at all levels across the country. Special consideration needs to be given to the full enjoyment of children's and women's rights, including measures to prevent violence against children and women, to prevent forced marriage, to combat torture, ill treatment and discrimination; and to protect human rights defenders, journalists and the rights of persons belonging to minorities.
13. In line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the EU reiterates its support for women to participate meaningfully in any peace initiative, including in peace negotiations, peace building and conflict prevention, as well as on the security and economic development of the country. The EU remains fully committed to supporting the implementation of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, the implementation of the law on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme.
14. The Council recalls that reforms in the areas of rule of law, justice and anti-corruption are essential, and urges Afghan authorities to step up anti-corruption measures, including by the full implementation of the national strategy, which includes effective and efficient investigation and prosecution of corruption. The EU remains committed to its support for an effective justice and law and order system.

Supporting economic and human development

15. Recognizing that lasting peace and sustainable development are closely related, the EU reaffirms its commitment, as a strong development partner for Afghanistan, to strengthen the institutions necessary for peace, stability and democracy, in addition to steadfast efforts for poverty reduction. In this regard the EU recalls its substantive financial support to the country. The EU welcomes the general progress made by the Government in implementing its ambitious reform agenda presented at the Brussels Conference in 2016, notably the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework.
16. The Council encourages the Government to step up efforts towards achieving all objectives under the current Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF). The EU looks forward to the expected adoption of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (GMAF), which should set out clear and measurable objectives for reform over the next years.
17. The EU reiterates its support to the Government in making fully operational the National Priority Programmes developed under the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. The EU recalls the necessity of assessing the outcomes of National Priority Programmes.

Addressing challenges related to migration and displacement

18. The Council recognises the commitment of the Government of Afghanistan to our cooperation on migration-related issues. At the same time the Council reiterates the importance of the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward and the Member States' bilateral arrangements on migration, indispensable tools in achieving our common goals in a sustainable way, ensuring an effective return and readmission process and fighting against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Their effective implementation must continue unabated in line with the general principles of international law.

19. Aware of the challenges migration and forced displacement pose to countries in the region, the EU welcomes the positive trends in voluntary returns from Pakistan, and notes the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to work on the sustainable reintegration of returnees. Reintegration is a crucial element for the success of a peace process. The EU will continue to support, including financially, the predictable, safe, orderly and dignified return of Afghan nationals in neighbouring countries and a comprehensive approach, based on the New York Declaration and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), in addressing the key challenges of migration and forced displacement.

20. The Council is deeply concerned about the scope of the humanitarian needs and the dire situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The EU also notes that a severe drought across large parts of the country is affecting the most vulnerable communities. The EU will continue to provide needs-based humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.

