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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Council Conclusions on Afghanistan

Delegations will find attached the text of Council conclusions on Afghanistan as approved by the Council via written procedure on 28 May 2020.

Council Conclusions on Afghanistan

1. Recalling previous Council Conclusions on Afghanistan, notably those of 8 April 2019, and the EU-Afghanistan Strategy, the European Union reaffirms its principled political commitment to support the people of Afghanistan on their path towards peace, security, stability, democracy, prosperity and self-reliance.
2. A peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan free of terrorism is a cornerstone for its own stability and development, as well as for that of the entire region and beyond. To that end, a negotiated political settlement leading to peace must build on the democratic and human rights achievements of the past 19 years. The political process must strengthen the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, constitutional order and national unity of Afghanistan, and allow for the gradual reduction of reliance on international political and financial support.
3. The EU urges the Government and all Afghan actors, including traditional, ethnic and religious leaders as well as armed groups, most notably the Taliban, to resolutely seize the current historic opportunity for lasting peace and genuine reconciliation. All must without delay commit actively to a meaningful and inclusive Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process that includes all stakeholders notably women, minorities and civil society at large. The claims and needs in relation to the numerous victims of war -including persons with disabilities, the internally displaced and the refugee population- have to be included in peace negotiations and in any subsequent agreement. This process should meet the aspirations of the majority of Afghan citizens for peace, stability and economic development, based on the progress made by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan since 2001. The EU expects the Government and all political actors to contribute to continue building a state with strong and transparent institutions, which offers dignified living conditions to all Afghan citizens without discrimination. In line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the EU reiterates the importance of meaningful participation of women in all peace initiatives including formal and informal peace negotiations.

4. The EU welcomes the political agreement between President Ghani and Dr Abdullah as an important step to strengthen the Republic and progress towards reconciliation and sustainable peace. The EU calls upon the Government to continue the course of inclusive and accountable governance, and to ensure the meaningful participation of a diverse and inclusive negotiating team, composed of Afghan political and civil society leaders, including women, at the intra-Afghan Negotiations. The respect of the constitutional order is paramount during the process.
5. The EU calls upon the Taliban to demonstrate a genuine and overall spirit of peace to build trust and confidence allowing the prompt start of intra-Afghan negotiations. The Taliban must build on their commitments in the bilateral Agreement with the government of the United States signed in Doha on 29 February. The unacceptably high level of violence and continued terrorist attacks by the Taliban after Doha is running contrary to these expectations and is undermining the prospect for intra-Afghan Negotiations; this violence is unacceptable and must immediately be reduced or stopped until a rapid full-fledged ceasefire enters into force. Incidents of violence against civilians by both parties have also continued and are unacceptable and in violation of international humanitarian law, exacerbating humanitarian needs and profoundly undermining the confidence and trust necessary for these negotiations. The EU strongly condemns attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel and facilities, including the horrific attack at the Dasht-e-Barchi hospital in Kabul of 12 May. A mutual release of prisoners, accepted by the Government outside its obligations, has commenced; the Taliban have to release their prisoners and hostages as they committed to, and current levels should allow for the start of the intra-Afghan Negotiations without any further delay. The EU stresses that the commitment and level of cooperation demonstrated today by all actors in Afghanistan, notably the Taliban, will determine tomorrow's political and financial support by the EU to the country's future.

6. In this regard, the EU unequivocally supports the Global Appeal made by the Secretary General of the United Nations on 23 March 2020 for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to focus efforts on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and to save lives on all sides. A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire is a subsequent step that needs to accompany the start of the Intra-Afghan Negotiations.
7. The EU supports without reservation UNSC Resolution 2513 of 10 March 2020, which neither recognises nor supports the restoration of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The EU with its Members States represented at the Security Council will advocate for the UNSC to ensure that any future review of the status of designations of individuals, groups, undertakings and entities on the List established and maintained pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) takes into strict consideration substantial progress by the Taliban to reduce violence, make concrete and sustained efforts to advance intra-Afghan Negotiations and genuinely commit to sustainable peace, stability and security in Afghanistan.
8. The EU urges all political actors to mitigate the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan, and cooperate to tackle it. Protecting people and controlling the outbreak is paramount and politics must be set aside. The EU will continue to provide need-based humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, in line with humanitarian principles, and calls on all actors to fully respect international humanitarian law including by allowing safe and unhindered humanitarian access; aid delivery is limited, unsustainable and inefficient during conflict.

9. The EU expects that the political process leads to an Afghanistan that, as a signatory of the UN Charter, upholds and promotes the values, rights and principles enshrined therein, and does not constitute a threat to international peace and security. Without genuine commitment on effectively enhancing governance, strengthening institutions and combating corruption, EU support will be reconsidered. The human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Afghans especially women, children, all persons belonging to minorities and groups at risk must be protected and further strengthened to benefit from and to further the economic, social, political and development achievements of the past 19 years. This should notably encompass genuine commitments on: ensuring the continuity of the Afghan State and of its international obligations; fighting and preventing terrorism and armed groups, drug production and trafficking, and human trafficking, the rule of law, including a fair and transparent justice system, addressing the root causes of and managing irregular migration; tackling regional instability; striving for poverty eradication; preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism; and fighting against the impunity of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Empowerment and human rights of women and girls, including educational, sexual and reproductive health and rights in the context of the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcome documents of their review conferences, must be ensured and the role and meaningful participation of women and girls in all spheres of society further strengthened. While affording international protection to persons in need, irregular migratory flows to Europe shall be contained and cooperation on return and readmission shall be reinforced pursuant to the agreed Joint Way Forward. The EU's level of cooperation and support to Afghanistan will be assessed, and if necessary reviewed, on the basis of the continued commitment to the aforementioned goals.

10. In order to facilitate and deliver a coordinated effort by international community in the upcoming 2020 International Ministerial Pledging Conference in Geneva, organised and co-hosted by Finland, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, a sense of urgency and tangible progress are needed to enable the international community to remain engaged, and to provide substantial support for the implementation of a peace agreement and the reconstruction of the country. Progress in peace negotiations, and any subsequent agreement, ought to be conducted in an inclusive way and respect the rights and freedoms referred to above. Afghan leaders must demonstrate their capacity to gather around the national interest and the protection of the country's unity and integrity.

11. The EU stands ready to provide political and financial support for the people of Afghanistan, notably by: (1) supporting the Geneva Ministerial Pledging Conference; (2) strengthening EU assistance for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) using of all instruments available in full cooperation with the UN, NATO and regional partners, to contribute to the stabilization of the country; (4) supporting institutional reform and capacity-building, including in the sectors of security and defence, based on the principles of democratic governance and on human rights; (5) assisting with the reintegration of former fighters as well as their families, the victims of conflict and the most vulnerable, including through specialized child protection programmes; and (6) promoting regional cooperation, stability, peace, trade and sustainable connectivity in line with "Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy" as adopted by FAC in October 2018, to help move from an economy marked by decades of conflict to stable and peaceful prosperity.

12. The EU emphasises that its political and financial support and that of its Member States, will be contingent on, determined by and if necessary reviewed in the context of, the principles above, also pooled with partners in the proposed “Key elements for a sustained international support to peace and development in Afghanistan”. The EU and its Member States call on the new Government to operate in a unified and inclusive manner in order to be a partner for implementing future financial and technical assistance. The principle of mutual accountability between the Government of Afghanistan and its partners remains an essential element for effective support. The Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the new European Consensus on Development will continue to guide our joint work in support of Afghanistan’s transition. This entails sound macro-economic policies, public financial management, a satisfactory level of good governance and a solid framework and safeguards for combating and preventing corruption.

13. The Council invites the EU High Representative, with the support of the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan, to convey the EU’s position to all actors in Afghanistan, and in our cooperation with regional and international partners, in view of the regional and global dimensions of achieving lasting peace and prosperity in the country.

