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Council conclusions on Afghanistan - 2839th General Affairs Council meeting

Brussels, 10 December 2007 - The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Following the Conclusions of the European Council in December 2006 and of the GAERC of February 2007, the Council reaffirms the EU's commitment to long-term support for the people and government of Afghanistan. The core principles of EU engagement remain unchanged: promoting Afghan leadership, responsibility and ownership, and fostering the development of a democratic, secure and sustainable Afghan State.
2. The Council welcomes the progress made this year. Afghanistan is experiencing significant economic growth. The media are generally free and robust. Health and Education have undergone important advances. Relations with neighbouring states, notably Pakistan, have shown signs of improvement. In this context, the Council welcomes the holding of the Joint Peace Jirga between Afghanistan and Pakistan and expresses its determination to support the Jirga process. The Council also welcomes the various initiatives to outreach, engaging with disaffected Afghans and offering them a return to society provided they renounce violence and are not part of any terrorist network.
3. Security remains a very direct challenge to stability in Afghanistan. The EU fully supports the work done by ISAF in providing a safe environment for reconstruction and development and assisting the Afghan Government in countering the insurgency and violent opponents of a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. The Council reaffirms its support for the objectives of ISAF.
4. However, Afghanistan still faces serious challenges, particularly regarding governance, rule of law, corruption, and narcotics, which threaten to undermine achievements to date. The EU and its member states will further support the Afghan Government in its effort to meet these challenges.
5. The Afghanistan Compact and the Joint Declaration Committing to a New EU-Afghan Partnership remain a comprehensive framework for EU engagement with Afghanistan. The Council notes the mutual commitments made within this framework, and encourages all parties to meet them. The Council urges the Afghan government to act towards fulfilment of the benchmarks in the Afghanistan Compact and the interim Afghan National Development Strategy. The EU will continue to do its part to support Afghanistan in its effort to achieve the goals set out.
6. The EU's cross-cutting priority remains the promotion of human rights, paying special attention to women's and children's rights. Execution of death penalties, the conditions for imprisoned children and women and alleged use of torture are recent examples of concern. The Council would like to make an urgent appeal to halt any possible further executions and to reconsider the ending of the de facto moratorium on the execution of death penalty.

7. The Council calls upon the Government of Afghanistan to further improve national and local governance. Substantive reform and major improvements in governance are needed urgently, both centrally and locally. In this context, the Council notes the establishment of a new Independent Directorate for Local Governance. The EU supports the development of effective administration at provincial level. Corruption among government officials must be tackled.
8. Enhancing governance and long-term development are at the heart of the EU's approach in Afghanistan. European Commission funding of programmes for rule of law, including through the Law and Order Trust Fund, and its support for PRTs, underline Europe's long-term commitment to security and development in Afghanistan. Steady work is needed to improve the impact of assistance, through greater coordination and coherence between the Afghan government, the EU and other international actors.
9. Progress on the rule of law is essential to the security and long term stability of Afghanistan, and the Council reiterates the importance of greater EU engagement in that sector. The Rome International Conference on Justice and Rule of Law in Afghanistan was a success, and the post- Rome justice process is on track. The Council reaffirms its support for the Government of Afghanistan's efforts to promote and extend the rule of law through development of the police, courts, prisons and the wider justice system to the regional and provincial level.
10. Strengthening the security sector, including the police, and promoting Afghan ownership in this regard are key for sustainable security in Afghanistan. The Council is determined to contribute significantly to police reform through the EU police mission. EUPOL is now deploying across the country and should reach full complement of 195 by Spring 2008. The Council welcomes all contributions to EUPOL Afghanistan made by third countries. The Council recognises the considerable challenges involved in ensuring that EUPOL reaches its full potential, and will give the mission all necessary backing to overcome them. The mission has been working with partners to improve coordination on police reform amongst the international community, and enhance Afghan ownership of those reforms. As a result the International Police Coordination Board (IPCB) is now meeting again and its Secretariat up and running. EUPOL efforts complement other efforts in these fields, notably within CSTC-A and ISAF.
11. The deployment of EUPOL represents an increase in EU efforts in Afghanistan. This underlines the need to place all EU efforts within an integrated and comprehensive approach. The EU reiterates its support to the central role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in coordinating donors' civilian efforts. In this context a properly-functioning Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) is essential. Moreover, promoting UN's outreach to all provinces is essential to support development and enhance coordination. The EU will promote greater donor coherence, including improved coordination between the military and civilian international engagement in Afghanistan.
12. Counter-narcotics efforts remain another central element in Afghanistan's development. Success in combating drugs production and trade is vital to the stability of the country as a whole. The Council recognises the links between the illicit drugs business and the insurgency. A coherent implementation of the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy is of the utmost urgency.
13. The Council recognises the importance of a strong commitment by neighbouring and regional partners to the stabilisation of Afghanistan, and favours advancing regional cooperation as an effective mean to promote security, governance and development in Afghanistan.
14. The Council will regularly review the implementation of EU policy towards Afghanistan."

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