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ELEMENTS FOR AN EU STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN 2014-16

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1. Purpose

The Council concluded on 20 January 2014 that the overarching strategic goal of the EU's future role in Afghanistan should be the development of Afghanistan's institutions to provide the resilience needed to safeguard progress to date and provide a countrywide platform for a more effective and ultimately sustainable Afghan state.¹

The EU has a long-term commitment to Afghanistan and is in the process of confirming its financial commitment up to 2020. A number of Member States have already indicated their continued long-term support. Afghanistan is the country which is the largest recipient of aid from the EU.² This document provides a strategic framework to better coordinate EU and Member States' civilian engagement in Afghanistan from mid-2014 to 2016, setting out the EU's objectives for the years 2014-16 and outlining the interventions planned to achieve those objectives. The strategy needs to be sufficiently flexible to both influence and respond appropriately to the range of potential scenarios in Afghanistan. The strategic goal and objectives have been developed in advance of clarity on the size and scale of any international military presence post-2014. Expectations as to the degree of progress and the delivery of international assistance in support of the Government of Afghanistan's priorities in the event of a very limited international presence will necessarily have to be tempered.

2. Political context

Afghanistan has made considerable political, security, economic and developmental progress over the past decade. But the gains made are mostly fragile and reversible. The country faces acute challenges over the coming three years to safeguard progress made and put in place the necessary reforms and structures to enable Afghanistan to meet its eventual goal of a fully sustainable state.

¹ The Council also stated 'The EU will focus its efforts in areas in which it adds most value. The key objectives should be to: promote peace, stability and security in Afghanistan and the wider region; reinforce democracy; encourage economic and human development, including further improving access to health and education; and foster rule of law and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of women and girls. The strategy should take into account the regional dimension and maintain the flexibility to respond appropriately to potential changes in Afghanistan.'

² This applies both as an aggregate and also for a number of individual donors, including the EU itself, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands.

Firm predictions about Afghanistan in 2016 are difficult to make. It is clear that Afghans will increasingly take control of their affairs over the coming three years. International influence will reduce. Even in the most optimistic scenario, Afghanistan will continue to be a fragile state with some of the lowest human development indicators globally, dependent on international financial assistance and prone to outbreaks of violent conflict. The central government will need to mitigate the threats posed by the insurgency, corruption and the criminalisation of the state — in particular from drug money — and maintain security and service delivery in sparsely populated rural areas, if it is to retain credibility and popular support.

Afghanistan is located in a complex and unstable region. Despite many flaws, democracy and freedom of speech are more advanced in Afghanistan than in much of the region. Many of its neighbours have recent histories of internal violent conflicts that have overspilt into Afghanistan due to the weakness of the state and linked with and exacerbated ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The peace process in Afghanistan should be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, but it is clear that all regional actors have important roles to play in both establishing a successful peace process and maintaining any resulting peace agreement, which would benefit not just Afghanistan, but also the wider region. Increased regional cooperation and interdependence can play an important role in underpinning a political process by creating incentives for countries in the region to benefit from a more stable Afghanistan, in particular through promoting increased trade and commercial activities.

In the short term, the ongoing insurgency and the transition of responsibility for security compound a difficult political and economic situation. The delay in finalising the Bilateral Security Agreement between the Government of Afghanistan and the US, which is a prerequisite for the continued presence of international forces, exacerbates uncertainty about the post-2014 situation. In the absence of an inclusive peace deal, it is likely that significant divergences in the operating environment in different areas of the country may require flexible and different approaches, from a spectrum of more stable areas continuing to develop more normalised state-building relationships to some conflict-afflicted areas reverting to humanitarian-led approaches. Over 600 000 people have been internally displaced due to the conflict. Neighbouring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan, continue to host large numbers of refugees from Afghanistan. Humanitarian needs among the most vulnerable segments of the Afghan population will persist for the foreseeable future. Continued progress will depend largely on the ability of the new government to: make progress in negotiating an inclusive

political settlement with all major insurgent and militia groups; maintain security; tackle corruption; and enact key economic and political reforms.

The credibility and success of the transition depend as much on strengthening democratic and accountable governance in Afghanistan at all levels, as on the capability of the security forces. This is a long-term, generational task, but progress in the next three years can both prevent backsliding and provide an important foundation for further advances in years to come. There is a major risk that Afghanistan will face severe economic contraction if the government is unable to generate the necessary confidence to attract investment and stem capital flight as the international presence and assistance contracts reduce. In particular, there is the need to create jobs for some 400 000 Afghans entering the workforce each year. If this demand is not met, there is a risk of a new generation of underemployed and alienated youth, which may lead to an increased pool for insurgent recruitment and uncontrolled and illegal immigration to neighbouring countries and Europe.

3. Strategic goal and objectives

The EU's strategy focuses on the areas critical to achieving progress in Afghanistan up to 2016, taking account of the frameworks established by international conferences in 2011 and 2012, in particular the *Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF)*, which will continue to be the basis for the relationship between the wider international community and the Government of Afghanistan for most of this period.

The critical importance of systemic reform to enabling progress in Afghanistan is one of the reasons why the EU will continue to champion the principles of the *TMAF*, aligning assistance with government priorities and using the collective leverage of the EU's funding to incentivise reform. The strategy will also be a platform for implementing the *Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development*, which will provide the legal framework for the EU's long-term engagement, subject to the finalisation of negotiations and the draft agreement being signed by the incoming administration.

The EU's overarching strategic goal for 2014-16 will be the development of Afghanistan's institutions to provide the resilience needed to safeguard progress to date and provide the platform for a more effective and ultimately sustainable Afghan state.

This goal will have four objectives which focus the EU's engagement on the areas where it can most add value and reinforce shared values between Europeans and Afghans, including

democracy, rule of law and human rights. The objectives have been drawn up to be mutually reinforcing. For example, effective civilian policing is clearly both a key component for and dependent on the existence of the rule of law and respect for human rights. Across all areas of the EU's strategy in Afghanistan, tackling corruption and advancing women's rights will be central to our engagement. The objectives will be:

- a. Promoting peace, stability and security in the region, by advocating an inclusive peace accord, mitigating threats from drugs and organised crime and supporting the development of a professional and accountable civilian police service;
- b. Reinforcing democracy: Functioning democracy needs to be embedded through democratic oversight at national, provincial and district levels, inclusive and transparent elections, and capacity-building in key institutions of governance;
- c. Encouraging economic and human development including creating a transparent economic framework to encourage investment, raise revenue, allocate finances, strengthen resilience and improve access to health and education, including for the most vulnerable segments of the population;
- d. Fostering the rule of law and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of women and children, by advocating respect for human rights (including in particular the full implementation of statutory protections for the rights of women and girls), supporting greater equality before the law of all citizens and assisting with the development of a comprehensive framework to strengthen and reform the justice sector.

3(a). Promoting Peace, Stability and Security

Lasting security will require an inclusive peace accord with insurgent groups, leading to a significant reduction in the incidence of conflict and violence in the country. The EU will look to promote an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned inclusive accord and respond opportunistically to support conflict resolution. Regional cooperation can play an important role in ensuring stability and neighbouring countries should play a full part in promoting peace and stability. In the interim, the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will be vital in containing the insurgency and laying the foundation for security. The 2012 Chicago summit set out a number of commitments from the international community to

support the development of ANSF capability. But this EU strategy focuses exclusively on the development of civilian policing.

The EU will use its engagement and instruments, as appropriate, to:

Sub-objectives

- support an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process leading to a political settlement that eschews violence, disavows any link with terrorism, and respects human rights, in particular the rights of women;
- enhance political and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours;
- support the regional solution strategy for the reintegration of Afghan refugees, based on principles of voluntary repatriation and sustainability;
- strengthen Afghan-led efforts to increase the quality and sustainability of civilian policing;
- strengthen Afghan and regional efforts to reduce organised crime and drug production, trafficking and demand.

3(b). Reinforcing Democracy

Embedding functioning politics will be critical to the legitimacy of the state. This requires functioning democratic oversight and the separation of governmental, legislative and judicial powers. Institutional change should be complemented by diverse and independent media, a pluralistic and active civil society, and greater participation and representation of women in all levels of public office. These steps will help ensure the strength of democratic institutions, increase the state's accountability to the people and improve effective delivery of services to citizens.

The EU will use its engagement and instruments, as appropriate, to support:

Sub-objectives

- robust electoral architecture and procedures;
- credible parliamentary elections in 2015, with outcomes broadly accepted by Afghans;

- greater accountability of the executive through parliamentary and independent oversight;
- reduced corruption and strengthened accountability through building the capacity of sub-national governance, focusing on improving service delivery and budget administration.

3(c). Encouraging economic and human development

Afghanistan needs to tackle corruption to increase the population's faith in the state and improve investor confidence. Sustained investment and the development of both the private sector and the rural economy will be critical to achieving the levels of growth needed to create jobs and increase domestic revenue. These are necessary to reduce poverty, improve livelihoods, deliver basic services, especially health and education, and accelerate social and human development, which remain well below regional norms.

The EU will use its engagement and instruments, as appropriate, to support the Government in achieving:

Sub-objectives

- increased human development, including for the most vulnerable segments of the population, in particular in education and health;
- improved public financial management;
- stronger financial self-sustainability of the Afghan state, through increased revenue generation;
- stimulation of the rural economy.

3(d). Fostering the rule of law and human rights

Much remains to be done to safeguard progress in human rights and ensure the full implementation of statutory provisions. The development of a functioning and effective justice system will be fundamental to ensuring that the rights of Afghans, in particular Afghan women and girls, are upheld and to improving the rule of law. Effective rule of law will strengthen accountability and increase business confidence, but will require significant institutional development. The EU will use its engagement and instruments, as appropriate, to:

Sub-objectives

- advance human rights, in particular the rights of women and children;
- support all components of the formal justice sector in working together more effectively in a more independent, efficient, less corrupt and accessible way, better upholding the principles of the rule of law;
- advocate for an end to the culture of impunity for serious war crimes and human rights abuses;
- maintain the right to freedom of assembly and strengthen the right to freedom of expression.

4. Conclusion

Afghans themselves will be largely responsible for whether the transition process is a success, and provides the basis for Afghanistan to move towards its eventual goal of self-sustainability. But the international community has highlighted on numerous occasions its willingness to provide exceptional levels of technical and financial assistance to help Afghanistan build on progress made to date. This strategy will better coordinate the interventions of the EU and Member States in support of the Afghan people and the principles, including increased alignment with the objectives of the Government of Afghanistan and incentivising key reforms. The strategy will provide the overarching framework for an indicative implementation plan, which will set out planned divisions of labour between EU instruments and Member States' interventions. Although the strategic goal and objectives should be robust enough to take account of most scenarios in Afghanistan, the implementation plan, and especially the pace of implementation, will be highly dependent on the security context.