

## **EU joint statement on behalf of the EU Member States**

### **"Heart of Asia" 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting**

**Amritsar, India, 4 December 2016**

[President Ashraf Ghani, Prime Minister Modi, Ministers, Excellences, distinguished colleagues]

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States [and the Kingdom of Norway].

We sincerely thank the Republic of India for hosting this 6th Heart of Asia Ministerial. This meeting comes exactly two months after the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, where 75 partner countries and 26 International Organisations came together to reaffirm our shared commitment to Afghanistan including regional and international support for ending violence to foster economic development and improve regional economic cooperation, and for a political process towards lasting peace and reconciliation.

On behalf of the European Union, I would like to thank all nations and organisations who contributed to making Brussels success.

We should build on that success. While we welcomed the exceptional financial pledges at Brussels, we also saw unprecedented positive engagement from regional nations. This can, and should, be nurtured in forums like the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process.

This engagement should now be translated into tangible support for and progress on the Afghan Governments plans for economic self-reliance and regional economic interconnectivity, which will benefit the entire region and everyone else around this table. Here we are encouraged by the hard work done since last year's meeting, but there is scope for much more if only there is political will to move towards increased trade and economic integration.

The challenges of migration, returnees and displacement also need recognition and action. We are all stakeholders in the unfolding migration crisis. By

supporting stability and focussing on improving the regional economic outlook the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process, can help stabilize migration pressures by providing new hope and opportunities that may encourage people to contribute to their own country's stability and development as well as return to their countries of origin.

Peace and Stability will play a crucial role for our joint success.

Cultivating an open, frank and honest discussion on the shared threats to security, stability and socio-economic development is an imperative. It is a discussion which has only started but which promises that given time and effort it will be possible to build the regional consensus that is so vital for achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan and stability throughout the region.

Peace is possible. And we should all align our efforts towards that key goal. We urge all state and non-state actors in the region to recognise that weapons provide no viable option of a political process leading to a negotiated settlement. Here we welcome the recent agreement signed between the Afghan Government and Hezbi Islami which demonstrated that there is space for conflicting parties to come together and agree a peaceful co-existence. It will be important that gains already made in the area of human rights and gender are not lost and the EU will explore possible forms of supporting the implementation of this Peace Agreement.

A 'lasting' peace will require a truly Afghan led and Afghan owned peace process. Afghanistan could and should be allowed to find its own way out of war without interference. Afghan actors hold the primary responsibility for establishing the parameters of an acceptable settlement.

There will be no lasting peace if the gains made in Afghanistan are undermined. In particular, this includes the improvements made on human rights and women's rights.

Meanwhile there is a need for a broader counterterrorism effort in the region. If anything unites the region it is the shared threat of terrorism. So many countries

could do much more to combat regional terrorism by working together. Action - including joint action – will be crucial to avoid terrorism taking even stronger root in the region. Here the European Union and its Member States [and the Kingdom of Norway] call on the regional countries to support the Afghan Government's wish for a regional conference on shared security.

The Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process, with its six confidence building measures, is one important forum where we can start to collectively address many of the aforementioned challenges that form the barrier to achieving peace in Afghanistan and stability throughout the region.

The EU and its Member States [and the Kingdom of Norway] look forward to continuing our support to the Heart of Asia and welcome the high level of participation from the region here today which underscores the importance of this process.