

Draft Statement at Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference

“Addressing Challenges, Achieving Prosperity”

4 December 2016, Amritsar, India

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure to join you at the 6th Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference. On behalf of the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, allow me to thank the Government of India for hosting this important event.

In just a few days the OSCE’s 57 participating States will gather for our annual Ministerial Council, this year held in Hamburg under Germany’s Chairmanship of the Organization. Fostering an inclusive dialogue based on shared interests and common concerns in an effort to rebuild trust and confidence among our participating States is a centerpiece of our efforts to overcome the current crisis in European security. The OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security has amply demonstrated that dialogue is the main channel not only for de-escalating conflicts and establishing trust and confidence, but also for fostering economic ties that can improve livelihoods. One of the areas where we see potential for overcoming differences and finding common ground is economic connectivity.

Indeed, there is a compelling linkage between facilitating economic connectivity and achieving security and stability. For Afghanistan, which is at the core of the Heart of Asia initiative, this linkage is more relevant than ever. Only last month, Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan for Economic Co-operation Adila Raz addressed the OSCE Permanent Council to underscore the significance of regional economic connectivity, education and capacity building and to explore opportunities for further engagement with the OSCE in these areas.

Afghanistan has been an OSCE Partner for Co-operation since 2003. Our assistance programs, implemented through our field operations in Central Asia largely focus on strengthening the security and management of borders between the Central Asian States and Afghanistan. We are convinced that effective management of borders can facilitate secure,

meaningful and sustainable connectivity between neighboring countries. One of our flagship programs is the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, which since 2009 has trained 850 Afghan border and customs officials, and over a thousand more from the five Central Asian OSCE participating States. Also since 2009, the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, has been providing specialized training for senior Kyrgyz and Afghan customs officials.

We also provide assistance in the area of education which is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and a key area of the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework for 2017-2021. Every year, in the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyztan, we enroll up to eight Afghan students, who obtain Master's degrees in political science and economic development. We invite Afghan young diplomats and junior professionals to our headquarters in Vienna to enhance their skills and help become a true asset for the future of their country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Each of our Organization's participating States has a different level of partnership with Afghanistan but we share one common vision: a stable and prosperous Afghanistan in a stable and prosperous region.

Lasting peace and stability will never be achieved unless economic ties are strengthened. We hope that today's declaration will lead towards improved regional economic connectivity and result in long-term sustainable projects for the prosperity of people throughout the region.

The OSCE continues to build broad and strategic partnerships, and to enhance engagement with its Asian Partners for Co-operation, with which it is increasingly joining efforts to address common challenges. And we continue to support Afghanistan's transformation toward peace, stability and prosperity for the benefit of all its people.

Thank you.