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THE HEART OF ASIA - ISTANBUL PROCESS
PROGRESS ASSESSMENT 2011-2015

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1. INTRODUCTION

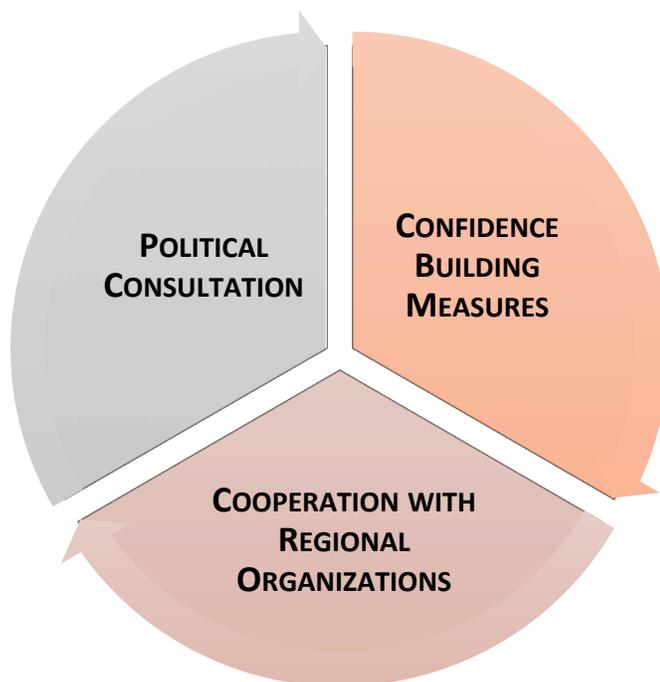
The Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process (hereafter referred to as “the Heart of Asia Process/HoA Process”) was officially launched in Istanbul, Turkey on November 2, 2011 by fourteen participating countries namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The Process also brings together supporting countries such as Australia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, France, Finland, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US) on board.

Regional and international organizations of the HoA Process include several bodies of the United Nations (UN) specially its Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN), Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation/Asian Development Bank (CAREC/ADB), Conference of Interactions and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The HoA Process aims at strengthening trust and promoting confidence through sustained interactions in the region. It has emerged as a platform for regional security, economic and political cooperation. Due to multifaceted challenges in the region and Afghanistan’s geostrategic location, the fourteen participating countries, as well as the supporting states and regional and international organizations put Afghanistan at the center of this Process during the Istanbul Conference in November 2011. Afghanistan currently functions as the permanent chair and focal point coordinating all operational aspects of the HoA Process. Each year, a participating country of the HoA co-chairs the Process and hosts the Ministerial Conference (MC).

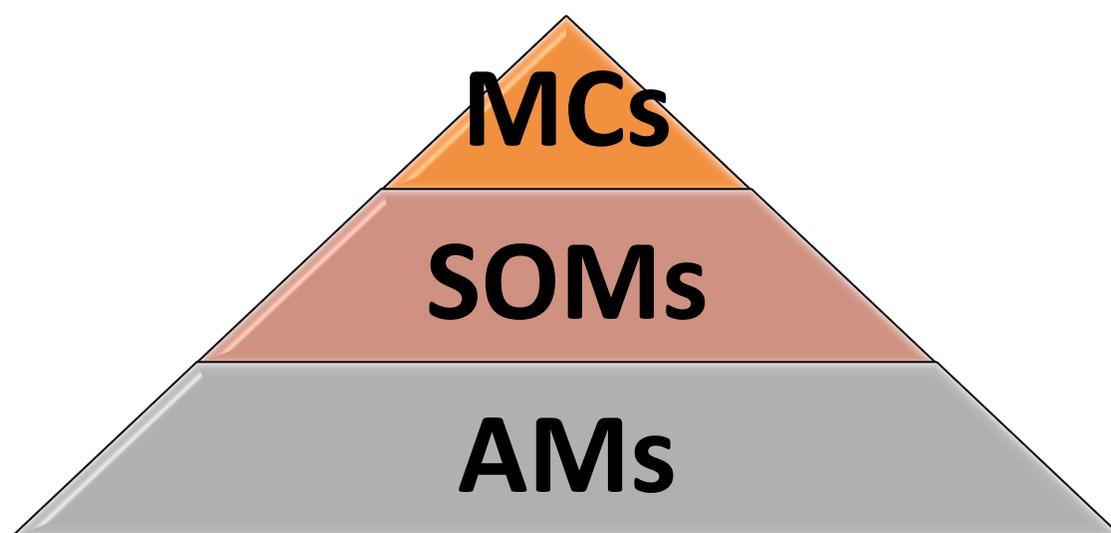
The HoA Process has become one of the most interactive voluntary state groupings in the HoA region. It brings Afghanistan's immediate and extended neighbors as well as international supporters together to achieve the following focus areas as indicated in the diagram below:



The first element focuses on political consultations involving Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbors. The second element aims at promoting dialogue through the implementation of six Confidence Building Measures (CBMs): Counter-Narcotics (CN), Counter Terrorism (CT), Disaster Management (DM), Education, Regional Infrastructure (RI) and Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities (TCIO). The third element intends to enhance regional cooperation by contributing with/to the efforts of other regional processes and organizations in the HoA region.

2. TIERS OF THE HEART OF ASIA

The Heart of Asia Process is comprised of a number of fora for dialogue that address the three focus areas highlighted above. Each tier is comprised of different levels of seniority such as the Ministerial Conferences (MCs), Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs), Ambassadorial Meetings (AMs), and Regional Technical Groups (RTGs) for the six confidence building measures, which will be discussed under the section for the CBMs:



2.1. MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES (MCs)

Ministerial Conferences take place on an annual basis. They are a platform, in which participating and supporting parties comprised of foreign ministers and highlevel officials come together to exchange ideas on the progress the HoA Process has made during the year and discuss ways to tackle challenges that still lie ahead. The Afghan President as well as the Head of the Government/State of the co-chairing country attend the opening ceremony and deliver their statements. Their presence is an indication of the importance that Afghanistan and the co-chairing nation attach to the HoA Process.

The respective Foreign Ministers of the fourteen participating countries as well as the supporting countries and representatives of regional and international organizations continue their deliberations through out the day of the conference. By delivering their

statements of support, all parties reaffirm their commitment to the Process during the MC. Further, the co-chair and host of the next MC is officially announced. Another important outcome of the MC is the annual declaration of the HoA Process that is developed by senior officials prior to the MC. Each declaration highlights a set of priorities that all participating countries agree to follow in the year ahead. These priorities include areas for fostering dialogue, special initiatives and emphasis on the timely implementation of the CBMs.

The table below indicates the number of Ministerial Conferences that have taken place between 2011 and 2015.

Ministerial Conferences			
No.	Date	Title	Location
1	November 02, 2011	Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan	Istanbul, Turkey
2	June 14, 2012	A New Agenda for Regional Cooperation in the 'Heart of Asia'	Kabul, Afghanistan
3	April 26, 2013	Stability and Prosperity in the 'Heart of Asia' through Building Confidence and Shared Regional Interests	Almaty, Kazakhstan
4	October 31, 2014	Deepening Cooperation for Sustainable Security and Prosperity of the 'Heart of Asia' Region	Beijing, China
5	December 9, 2015	Enhanced Cooperation for Countering Security Threats and Promoting Connectivity in the Heart of Asia Region	Islamabad, Pakistan

2.2. SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETINGS (SOMs)

Political consultations on regional issues within the HoA take place during Senior Officials Meetings. SOMs directly influence and shape the discourse and agenda of the MC, and have decision-making authority. SOMs also serve as an important platform, where participating countries, supporting countries and regional and international organizations engage with one another. As reflected in the following table, three to four SOMs take place each year. The first SOM of the year sets the theme. The other two SOMs are held to continue political consultations, review the progress of the CBMs and to finalize the ministerial declaration.

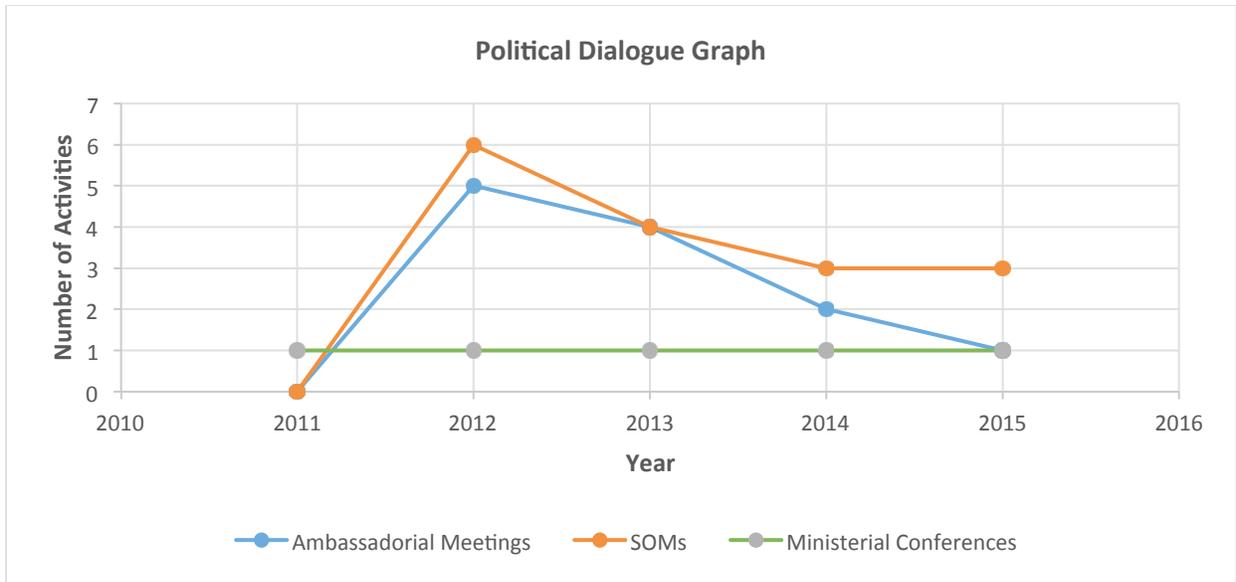
Senior Officials Meetings			
No.	Date	Title	Location
1	April 8, 2012		Tokyo
2	February 29, 2012		Kabul
3	April 18, 2012		Ashgabat
4	June 13, 2012		Kabul
5	September 24, 2012		New York
6	October 18, 2012		Ankara
7	February 6, 2013		Baku
8	March 25, 2013		Kabul
9	April 25, 2013		Almaty
10	September 23, 2013		New York
11	January 18, 2014		New Delhi
12	July 10, 2014		Beijing
13	October 10, 2014		Beijing
14	May 25, 2015		Islamabad
15	September, 27 2015		New York
16	December 8, 2015		Islamabad

2.3. AMBASSADORIAL MEETINGS (AMs)

Ambassadorial Meetings are mostly held in Kabul. They are taking place on an ad hoc basis, as the Permanent Chair deems necessary. They serve as an initial consultation to highlight a set of issues that are either of particularly significance or require urgent attention. AMs are held in order to have an initial discussion with the participating countries before taking on the issue to the Senior Officials level. AMs are also held to do some initial work on behalf of Senior Officials on a particular issue dealing with any of the six CBMs. The table below indicates the number of AMs that have taken place so far:

Ambassadorial Meetings		
NO.	Location	Date
1	Kabul, Afghanistan	5th February, 2012
2	Kabul, Afghanistan	22 July, 2012
3	Kabul, Afghanistan	15 September 2012
4	Kabul, Afghanistan	19 November 2012
5	Kabul, Afghanistan	19 December 2012
6	Kabul, Afghanistan	27 January 2013
7	Kabul, Afghanistan	9 April 2013
8	Kabul, Afghanistan	8 May 2013
9	Kabul, Afghanistan	2 June 2013
10	Kabul, Afghanistan	14 October 2014
11	Kabul, Afghanistan	23 October 2014
12	Kabul, Afghanistan	5 December 2015

The graph below provides a visual of the Ministerial Conferences, Senior Officials Meetings and Ambassadorial Meetings between 2011 and 2015.



3. REGIONAL POLITICAL CONSULTATION

Regional political consultations are an important step towards building confidence and generating regional consensus and coherence. This is an intrinsic ingredient of regional cooperation to bring the HoA countries and stakeholders together around a set of common regional interests and to foster understanding. An increase in coherent regional political consultations has the potential to strengthen genuine cooperation in the HoA region.

The HoA Process has identified regional political consultation as its primary element to bring Afghanistan, its near and extended neighbors around the table. In fact, the Process has generated a new momentum of regional cooperation in the HoA region and made progress in creating a sense of interconnectedness between the region and Afghanistan.

Each of the different tiers of the Process has an important role to play in strengthening political consultations. Political consultations were formally integrated into the Process through Articles 20, 21, and 22 of the 2014 Beijing Declaration. The Ministerial Conferences and Senior Officials Meetings have demonstrated their utility as venues to

bring senior figures of the region together for bilateral and multilateral discussions on the margins of these important events.

4. CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES (CBMS)

Regional cooperation requires the identification of areas of common interests. The HoA Process has done so by setting six thematic Confidence Building Measures (CBMs):

1. Counter-Terrorism (CT);
2. Counter-Narcotics (CN);
3. Disaster Management (DM);
4. Education (Ed);
5. Regional Infrastructure (RI);
6. Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities (TCIO);

These CBMs promote regional dialogue and cooperation within the HoA Process. Each CBM has one or more lead countries that coordinate the activities and keep track of the progress made in each of these areas. Each CBM also has a desk within the General Directorate for Regional Cooperation of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a designated person acting as a focal point to follow up with lead, participating and supporting countries and organizations.

4.1. REGIONAL TECHNICAL GROUP (RTG) MEETINGS

At the RTG Meetings, technical delegates of the HoA region come together to discuss important measures needed for the successful implementation of the CBMs. According to Article 25 of the Beijing Declaration, the lead countries of the CBMs should convene at least two RTGs each year. One RTG Meeting is supposed to take place within two months of each MC and the second no later than four months prior to the following MC. At the first RTG Meeting of the year, the activities for the coming year are identified and prioritized. The second RTG Meeting of the year serves to review progress. The table below is a record of all RTGs that have taken place so far.

COUNTER NARCOTICS

Date	Place
December 05, 2012	Kabul
January 25, 2013	Baku
June 26, 2013	Kabul
April 29, 2015	Baku

COUNTER TERRORISM

Date	Place
September 03, 2012	Ankara
August 18, 2012	Abu Dhabi
August 26, 2013	Abu Dhabi
March 11, 2015	Ankara

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Date	Place
September 10, 2012	Islamabad
September 04, 2013	Astana
May 13, 2014	Islamabad
September 08, 2015	Islamabad

EDUCATION CBM RTGs

Date	Place
December 16, 2012	Kabul
April 17, 2013	Tehran
September 16, 2013	Tehran
November 23, 2015	Tehran
December 02, 2015	Tehran

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Date	Place
January 24, 2013	Ashgabat
September 10, 2013	Ashgabat
February 27, 2015	Ashgabat

TRADE, COMMERCE AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Date	Place
December 05, 2012	Kabul
January 29, 2013	Kabul
March 19, 2013	Delhi
April 18, 2013	New Delhi
August 29, 2013	New Delhi
May 15, 2014	New Delhi
October 01, 2015	New Delhi
November 19, 2015	New Delhi

4.2. CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURE, PARTICIPANTS AND ACTIVITIES

There are six thematic Confidence Building Measures, which are illustrated below together with the participating and supporting countries and organizations:

4.2.1 Counter Narcotics (CN-CBM)

Russia and Azerbaijan are the lead countries of the CN-CBM. Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates are participating countries. Supporting countries and organizations are Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Italy, Sweden, the UK, the US, EU, UNAMA and UNODC. The CBM on Counter Narcotics is an important area of regional cooperation in the HoA region. The production, trafficking and use of illicit drugs is a serious issue in the region. In order to implement measures to achieve the objectives of this CBM more

successfully, a faster pace and stronger commitment is required. Since the inception of the HoA Process, two activities indicated in the table below have been implemented under this CBM.

CN-CBM Annual Activity Status Table	
Year 2014	
Implemented	1. An expert level seminar on anti-cannabis took place in Moscow in March 5, 2014.
Year 2015	
Implemented	1. A regional workshop on “Recommendations for Mutual Application of the Method for the Controlled Delivery” between the Competent Authorities of the Heart of Asia countries took place in Kabul on February 17, 2015.

4.2.2. Counter Terrorism (CT-CBM)

Afghanistan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates are the lead countries of the CT-CBM. Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia and Tajikistan are the participating countries. Its support countries and organizations are Egypt, France, Iraq, the UK, the US, United Nations Center for Preventative Diplomacy (UNRCCA), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF). In the Counter Terrorism CBM, several activities have been implemented successfully. Though, participating countries in this CBM need to exercise their full capacity given the challenges that the HoA region faces in this regard.

CT-CBM Annual Activity Status Table	
Year 2013	
Implemented	1. A meeting on Counter IED’s (expert level meeting to share information and analysis about the most widely and likely precursors used in making of explosives, such as ammonium nitrate as well as

	lethal devices and their transportation routes) took place in Abu Dhabi on August 26, 2013.
Year 2014	
Implemented	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A meeting on terrorism financing to share information and discuss the typologies for financing terrorism took place in Kabul, Afghanistan on 26-27 February 2014. 2. Afghanistan organized a follow up workshop on IED's in Kabul on March 8-9, 2014. 3. Tajikistan hosted an expert level meeting to share information on border control measures and identification of one or two borders as a pilot project for establishing and strengthening the joint border control in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 25-26 September 2014.
Year 2015	
Implemented	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A meeting was held in Dushanbe on May 14-15, 2015. In this meeting the UNRCCA briefed the CT-CBM participating countries about the Joint Plan of Action on implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia and participants discussed their efforts in implementing the UN Global CT Strategy. 2. Turkey organized a training workshop, "Defense against Suicide Bombing" in Ankara on April 8-10, 2015.

4.2.3. Disaster Management (DM-CBM)

Pakistan and Kazakhstan are the lead countries of the DM-CBM. Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey are the participating countries of this CBM. Its supporting organizations are UNAMA, UNDP, UNISDR, UNOCHA, UNECE, WFP, UNESCAP and UNSPECA. The DM-CBM is another important regional area of cooperation considering the vulnerability of majority of the HoA countries to natural disasters. This CBM has made some progress during the past five years in

implementing a number of activities indicated in the table below, yet stronger commitment and more allocation of resources are required in order to foster the process of cooperation in this area. Lead, participating and supporting countries and organization could intensify their collective efforts in planning and organizing activities and exercises against natural disasters when they strike.

DM-CBM Annual Activity Status Table	
Year 2013	
Implemented	1. An International workshop on Drill in the field of Crisis Management (support for the development of join guidelines for disaster management) was held in Poland on December 8-18, 2013.
Year 2014	
Implemented	<p>1. National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan organized and hosted a bilateral visit of Afghanistan NDMA delegation led by Director General of Afghanistan NDMA in Islamabad on January 13-15, 2014.</p> <p>2. The government of Japan through JICA organized a Seminar on Disaster Management for Afghanistan in Japan February 2-11, 2014.</p> <p>3. An International Conference on Sharing Experiences and Developing Regional Hazard & Risk Picture was held in Islamabad on May 12-13, 2014.</p>
Year 2015	
Implemented	<p>1. Pakistan organized a 6-day Composite Training Program on Disaster Risk Management for Afghan Disaster Management Officials in Islamabad on February 09-14, 2015.</p> <p>2. A Regional Training on Disaster Management took place in China on October 27-29, 2015.</p>

4.2.4. Education (Ed-CBM)

Iran is the lead of this CBM. Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan are the participating countries. Its supporting countries are Australia, Egypt, Poland, the UK and the US. The Ed-CBM is important because students need quality education. Education is also one major factor that has led to increased challenges of radicalization among the youth in the HoA region. Informal educational systems of some of the HoA countries need reform and structure in order to counter radicalization. While this CBM has focused primarily on training activities, the attention needs to be shifted in order to focus on activities linking regional educational institutions and capacity building efforts to counter radicalization too.

Ed-CBM Annual Activity Status Table	
Year 2013	
Implemented	1. A Book exhibition took place in Kabul.
Year 2014	
Implemented	1. Symposium on small and medium enterprises growth and regional trade in Afghanistan and in the Heart of Asia region took place in Kabul on February 23, 2014. This was a joint activity with the TCI-CBM, as it was supported by the Central Asia University of Agha Khan.
Year 2015	
Implemented	1. A regional seminar on epidemic diseases was implemented by the Ministry of Health of I.R of Iran in Tehran on August 25-26, 2015

4.2.5. Regional Infrastructure (RI-CBM)

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are the lead countries of the RI-CBM. Afghanistan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Turkey are the participating countries. Its supporting countries and organizations are Egypt, Germany, Italy, the UK, the US, UNAMA, UNECE, UNSPECA and UNESCAP. Constructive efforts

have taken place under this CBM that have led to the compilation of major regional projects such as CASA 1000 and TAPI. This CBM should facilitates political discussions in order to pave the way for the implementation of regional infrastructural projects. Thus, specific activities for the facilitation of political dialogue in support of the implementation of such regional infrastructural projects are required.

RI-CBM Annual Activity Status Table
No Activities

4.2.6. Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities (TCIO-CBM)

India is the lead country of the TCIO-CBM. Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, UAE and Turkmenistan are the participating countries. Its supporting countries and organizations are Australia, Canada, Egypt, the EU, Germany, the UK, the US, UNAMA, UNDP, UNECE, UNSPECA and UNSCAP. This area of regional cooperation seeks to foster the process of economic integration of the HoA region though most of the activities of this CBM have only been bilateral, mainly between India and Afghanistan. This needs to be shifted to multilateral activities where more Heart of Asia countries are involved.

TCIO-CBM Annual Activity Status Table	
Year 2013	
Implemented	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Capacity Building Workshop for Afghan Chamber Officials was held in New Delhi on June 17-24, 2013. 2. Business to Business Meetings with fresh and dry fruits Traders Delegation of Afghanistan took place in Mumbai and Hyderabad on June 24-25, 2013. 3. International conference Cum Exhibition on “Doing Business with Afghanistan” was held in Delhi on November 18-20, 2013.

	<p>4. A workshop on Investment opportunities in Afghanistan was held in Mumbai on November 20, 2013.</p> <p>5. India-Afghanistan innovation fair took place in Mazar-e-Sharif on March 4-5, 2013.</p> <p>6. India-Afghanistan Innovation Fair was organized in Kabul on December 4-5, 2013.</p>
Year 2014	
Implemented	<p>1. A workshop on Central Asia Business Opportunity took place in Islamabad on April 14-16, 2014.</p> <p>2. A symposium on effective support for regional SMEs took place in Kabul on February 23, 2014.</p> <p>3. Afghanistan-India Construction sector business to business (B2B) Matchmaking event was organized in India on January 31, 2014.</p> <p>4. Road Show on Investment opportunities in Afghanistan took place in Ahmadabad on April 14-16, 2014.</p>
Year 2015	
Implemented	<p>1. Regional Conference on Trade Facilitation in the Heart of Asia on November 24-25, 2015.</p>

5. THE PROCESS AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The HoA Process and its political consultations and CBMs in the areas of counter narcotics, counter terrorism, disaster management, trade-commerce and investment opportunities, regional infrastructure and education have complimented and improved the works of existing regional organizations such as the SAARC, SCO and ECO.

However, the HoA Process still needs to enhance its efforts to establish direct working relations with these important existing regional organizations and to go beyond making complementary contributions to their mandates. While the HoA Process includes several regional organizations and processes as its supporting entities, participating countries who are members of these organizations mentioned above could also encourage these organizations to work more closely with the HoA Process in order to achieve a variety of mutual interests.

6. OVER ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The HoA Process has made significant strides on all fronts during its first five years of existence. The degree of regional political dialogue within the HoA Process has led to improved cooperation between the countries in the HoA region. During the first five years of the HoA Process, five MCs, 14 SOMs and 12 AMs have taken place to discuss issues of regional concern including all of the thematic areas of the CBMs. While these events have helped the HoA as a region to make steady progress, more effective interactions are necessary to promote regional political consistency and a sense of community. The following recommendations are sought to make the HoA Process more effective:

6.1. *Invigorating MCs:* MCs are the highest level of interaction amongst the delegations of the HoA participating and supporting countries and organizations. It is therefore crucial that the level of participation remains high and that participating countries of the HoA are represented by their Foreign Ministers in order to maintain the high profile of the HoA Process, which is needed in order to achieve its expected objectives. In addition, MCs should increasingly enhance political dialogue and engagements of high-level officials of the HoA region and supporting countries and organizations.

6.2. *Strengthening SOMs:* Considering the positive impacts of the interactions of the Senior Officials in strengthening dialogue, it is recommended that at least four SOMs should take place annually. One SOM is conducted to present the theme of the MC and

focuses on the agenda of the year. Another two SOMs are held for political dialogue and preparatory meetings for the MC. An additional one could take place in order to further expand the political discussions and to explore other areas of regional cooperation. Also, participating and supporting parties are urged to send their senior officials in order to enrich and strengthen the processes of political dialogue and decision-making.

6.3. *Building Stronger Bonds:* The number of diplomatic gatherings, where Ambassadors and other representatives of participating and supporting countries and organizations are invited to attend informal receptions and discussions should be increased. This will provide a friendly environment for Ambassadors, diplomats and representatives of the HoA stakeholders and will also allow them to build stronger bonds and brainstorm new ideas. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul and Embassies of the Participating and Supporting countries could host these gatherings.

6.4. *Enable side-event meetings:* The HoA region could promote side-event meetings at its Ministerial Conferences and Senior Officials Meetings, in which different participating and supporting parties engage in further bilateral and multilateral discussions. For example, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) emerged during the Heart of Asia Ministerial in Islamabad in 2015. Such developments are very crucial for the promotion of regional cooperation in the HoA region. SOMs are opportunities for senior figures to engage with their counterparts in meetings that would otherwise have been politically difficult to arrange.

6.5. *More Open Discussions:* It is recommended that more time should be allocated for open discussions at all levels of interactions within the HoA Process, including MCs, SOMs and AMs. Representatives of the HoA region need sufficient time to express their respective countries views on a given issue and present ways forward. This approach would also help to make these events of the HoA Process more results-oriented.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS ON CBMS

As reflected in the tables above, every CBM has made significant progress since the launch of the HoA Process in 2011; yet further improvements are needed to achieve the collective objectives of the HoA Countries. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed to lead to the successful achievement of the CBMs:

7.1. *Maintaining Monitoring and Evaluation:* Each of the lead countries should put forward a coherent M&E strategy in order to keep track of the progress that has been made under each CBM. The findings of the systematic data collection of the CBMs will help to assess the progress and implementation of the CBMs and should be presented by the lead nations during the SOMs and the MCs.

7.2. *Working through Action Plans:* Each lead country in cooperation with supporting countries should put forward a clear and coherent timeline with very specific and binding due dates that are crucial for the proper implementation of the activities of each CBM within a yearly timeframe. This will keep the lead countries in a better position to jointly drive the implementation of the planned activities forward together with other members of the CBMs within the agreed timeframe. This will also strengthen the role of supporting parties in co-hosting and organizing events or activities according to the Action Plan.

7.3. *Starting Fresh with New Activities:* Each CBM could start the year with a new set of annual activities outlined in an Action Plan mentioned above. The activities may include the rollover of any key activities remaining from previous years. This will keep the momentum high and bring new enthusiasm and energy in moving forward and achieving the CBMs.

7.4. *Supporting the Lead Countries:* Lead countries have been active in implementing their CBMs. But they need the support of all participating and supporting members. This is why lead countries are urged to oversee a coherent Action Plan involving all participating and supporting nations with allocated tasks to enhance the

achievement of all the CBMs. Every lead country and the participating and supporting parties should share the responsibility to deliver the planned activities of the HoA Process.

7.5. Reviewing the CBM Composition: Some CBMs require their membership and composition to be reviewed so new members could be included. China, for instance, should be invited to become a participating country in the RI-CBM given the important role it plays in regional infrastructure development throughout the region. Iran and India could both consider becoming co-lead countries for the Ed- and TCIO CBMs. These would help to broaden the membership of the CBMs and add more weight to better planning and implementation of the CBMs.

7.6. Continuity and Clarity: It is important that lead as well as participating countries designate specific focal points in their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs in order to successfully achieve the expected outcomes of the CBMs. This would help them to know how the CBMs work and will ensure clarity and continuity in the HoA Process. Sometimes, it seems that there is lack of understanding amongst some CBM lead or participating countries on how the CBMs can be achieved. RI-CBM, for example, faces this challenge. While constructive efforts have taken place under this CBM with the compilation of major regional projects such as CASA 1000, TAPI etc. The role of this CBM is not to list or implement big projects but to facilitate political discussions or workshops in order to pave the way for the implementation of the regional projects through proposing specific activities.

7.7. Improving Coordination: It is highly recommended that all the HoA countries and organizations coordinate all of their activities with Afghanistan as the permanent chair of the HoA Process and with each other. Some lead, participating and supporting countries and organizations have been very active in delivering activities, but their activities were not coordinated with Afghanistan. As a result, there is little data available on such activities, which makes it difficult for the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assess their impacts.

8. RECOMMENDATION ON WORKING WITH REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The HoA Process still needs to improve cooperation with the existing regional organizations. The HoA Process has had limited contacts with other regional organizations since it came to existence in 2011. Considering the fact that the HoA Process was new, it needed some time to establish itself by putting in practice all of the relevant measures. In the coming years, the HoA Process should establish stronger ties with regional organizations by:

8.1. *Enhancing Communications:* the HoA Process needs to develop a coherent plan to enhance cooperation with other regional organizations. Participating members of the HoA Process are also prominent members of regional organizations, and, therefore, they could play a key role to function as a bridge between the HoA and the respective regional organizations.

8.2. *Promoting joint Working Relations:* the HoA Process should plan joint activities with relevant regional organizations. This in turn will help to address the interests of those regional organizations by helping them achieve the objectives of their mandates. For this to take place more effectively, regional organizations could play a more active leadership role in organizing certain events and activities through the six thematic CBMs together with the HoA Process.

9. CONCLUSION

Ministerial Conferences, Senior Officials Meetings and Ambassadorial Meetings of the HoA Process are fostering regional cooperation through political dialogue. All of these events have been instrumental in creating regional political coherence and a sense of amity among the HoA countries. MCs, SOMs and AMs lead to substantial outcomes such as the creation of the Heart of Asia Process in 2011, the adoption of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in 2012, and the ongoing discussions on regional counter terrorism strategy.

In addition, the HoA Process has generated valuable opportunities for Senior Officials of participating countries as well as supporting countries and organizations to interact with one another at these events in order to discuss issues related to Afghanistan and the region. This is a clear sign that promoting regional political dialogue is taking the region towards political coherence and regional harmony.

Political dialogue also brings the HoA countries and stakeholders together to achieve a set of common regional interests and to enhance their understanding towards each other. While the participating countries of the HoA continue to play an important role in using this process for the good of the region, countries outside the HoA region, who are part of the HoA Process, are also in the position to provide technical, fiscal and operational assistance given their supporting roles at any stages of the Ministerial, Senior Officials and Ambassadorial gatherings, and in the implementation of the CBMs.

Together, participating and supporting countries have the opportunity to strengthen cooperation in this region on pressing areas that otherwise would also have its harming impacts throughout the world. The Heart of Asia brings countries and organizations from the region and beyond and truly reflects a spirit of regional and international cooperation with many opportunities that should be utilized to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the HoA region and throughout the world.