

EU joint messages for the RECCA 6th Regional Economic Cooperation Conference

Kabul, 4th September 2015

Minister, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, the Kingdom of Norway and the Swiss Confederation.

As we approach the end of the Government's first year in office, we welcome the vigour with which regional economic cooperation has been advanced, with concerted efforts towards confidence building, active participation in regional dialogues, and sustained commitment to regional economic projects.

The European Union and its Member States, the Kingdom of Norway and the Swiss Confederation believe that increased regional economic cooperation, in particular the development of intra-regional trade and infrastructure and agreed frameworks for efficient exploitation of shared natural resources, including water basin management, will provide benefits for all countries in the region. Progress in economic integration and regional connectivity is much needed to encourage investment and eradicate entrenched poverty.

We strongly welcome the prospect of tangible progress being made on large-scale regional energy/infrastructure projects, including electricity delivery and trade/transit agreements. To ensure that RECCA VI helps achieve shared economic gains, there must be a clear focus on feasible projects and realistic timeframes. We encourage the attempts to focus on a list of a *limited* number of priority projects in the fields of regional trade, transit, and investment, in order to build on the necessary political momentum for their implementation.

Rather than creating any new structures or competing processes, concrete progress can be made on the financing and implementation of RECCA's prioritised projects by linking up to the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process' two economic Confidence Building Measures on regional infrastructure and trade, commerce and investment opportunities, where relevant. These Confidence Building measures may also help ensure a results-oriented follow-up of RECCA-identified activities, as well as appropriate involvement of the Istanbul Process participating states, without creating new mechanisms that duplicate effort.

The European Union and its Member States, the Kingdom of Norway and the Swiss Confederation thank the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for organising the 6th Regional Economic Cooperation Conference. RECCA must be used to as a solid launch-pad for even more successful regional economic cooperation, inducing greater prosperity and connectivity that will increase the stability of both Afghanistan and the wider region.