AFGHANISTAN-CENTERED REGIONAL COOPERATION
From Planning to Implementation

November 2018
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The next Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan will take place from November 27-28, 2018 in Geneva under the theme, “Securing Afghanistan’s Future: Peace, Self-reliance and Connectivity.” The conference theme is reflective of the link between peace and development, and the role that regional cooperation can play in building confidence and utilizing the enormous economic opportunities that exist in our region.

Regional cooperation is an important pillar of our foreign policy and an important component of our development strategy. Our vision, in this context, is to restore Afghanistan’s historical role as a land-bridge and a convergence point between Central Asia, South Asia, China, the Middle East, and Europe, in order to achieve greater regional cooperation and integration for the benefit of peace and prosperity in the wider region.

We have been pursuing this vision with support from regional and international partners under two prominent Afghanistan-centered regional cooperation platforms: RECCA and HoA-IP. Our joint efforts under these two frameworks and other regional cooperation platforms in the wider region have helped regional economic cooperation take root, paving the way for concrete and tangible cooperation in a wide range of areas, including energy, transport networks, trade and transit facilitation, communications, business-to-business partnerships, and labor support as well as confidence building in important areas such as counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics.

This brief paper has been developed with a view to present an update on our recent efforts and achievements in the area of regional cooperation in general, and regional economic cooperation and connectivity in particular. As presented in the paper, our region has witnessed inspiring achievements over the past two years, exemplified by an expanding network of pipelines, transmission lines, and fiber optic cables, as well as by the finalization of important transport and transit agreements including the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement and the operationalization of freight trains and air cargo corridors across the region.

It is my earnest conviction that with our joint commitment to be renewed in the upcoming Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan and the subsequent Ministerial Meetings of RECCA and HoA-IP, our joint efforts over the next two years will move us closer towards realizing our common vision for deepened connectivity and expanded trade with greater confidence and synergy across the region.

I wish to thank all the focal points from the Afghan line ministries and agencies as well as the UN Development Program, for their invaluable contributions to the preparation of this paper.

Sincerely,
Salahuddin Rabbani
Minister of Foreign Affairs
When experts look back at the end of this decade in Central, South and South West Asia, they are likely to describe it as a turning point in regional cooperation, with significant improvements in cross-border connectivity being made across the region. In political and security terms, but in particular in economic terms, a gradual shift is taking place throughout the region—for long frozen circumstances have begun to thaw, gradually giving rise to a dynamism which has the potential to lift the prospects of average people across the western crescent of the Asian continent. Afghanistan is at the center of this dynamism, with a new wave of regional cooperation efforts centered on Afghanistan, leading to the formation of two prominent Afghanistan-focused regional cooperation frameworks, namely the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

Numerous studies over the past years have suggested that there is a positive correlation between regional economic cooperation and economic growth. Regional economic cooperation can facilitate trade, investment, and the transfer of knowledge, which are each critical for productivity and growth. These same studies further contend that specific factors, such as the potential for trade complementarity between countries and the level of basic infrastructure development within a country, are chief determinants of successful regional economic cooperation and integration efforts. They can also create new incentives towards achieving lasting peace and stability.

By creating synergy among initiatives of neighboring and regional countries and building increased connectivity in energy and transport terms, not to mention augmenting digital connectivity, Afghanistan and its regional partners are forging ahead with broad based progress that translates into community progress for average people and their families. When exports and trade increase, jobs are created, income is generated, poverty is reduced, and communities get on more solid, sustainable paths of development. Headway in regional and international economic relations translate into improving personal livelihoods and social advancement of the Afghan people in small towns and rural areas, as well as city-based urban environments, and will therefore contribute significantly to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A major contributor to this new era of change across the region involves the emergence of new transport and transit corridors including the Lapis Lazuli Route, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Chabahar Corridor. This economic progress dovetails with a newfound regional and global momentum in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Across the region, greater regional engagement by countries and expanding economic cooperation throughout Central Asia bode well for regional progress across the board. In particular, advancement on the regional economic integration front continues apace. This includes considerable progress on the two largest cross-border infrastructure projects, the TAPI natural gas pipeline and the CASA 1000 electricity transmission line. As another major achievement, the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement was signed in November 2017 on the sidelines of RECCA-VII in Ashgabat, and the efforts are underway to implement the agreement.

Other major projects such as the Five Nations Railway Corridor and the Chabahar Corridor have also witnessed considerable progress this year.

Furthermore, an increasing number of air cargo corridors between Afghanistan and major destinations in the region and beyond have also been operationalized this year.

Nonetheless, there is further progress to make. There remain critical gaps in regional infrastructure. The region also faces various forms of trade and transit barriers and lacks state-of-the art trade and transit agreements, including a regional wide free trade agreement. Addressing these challenges requires more intensive collaborative efforts and greater synergy among various regional cooperation platforms in the wider region.
RECCA was established in 2005 as an Afghanistan-centered regional cooperation framework aimed at promoting cross-border economic cooperation through a list of prioritized regional economic cooperation and investment projects that are capable of contributing to economic growth, job creation, income generation and confidence building in the wider Central, South and Southwest Asia and beyond.

The RECCA Conference in Ashgabat has been described as a turning point. From 14-15 November 2017, the Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan convened in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan in support of the RECCA-VII theme of “Deepening Connectivity and Expanding Trade through Investment in Infrastructure and Improving Synergy.” Co-chaired by the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Conference convened senior diplomats and high-level delegations from some 67 countries and international organizations (and many more regional business and civil society leaders)—each an important ongoing stakeholder in the progressive vision for increased regional trade, transit, and investment throughout the wider region.

Beginning with RECCA-V in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in 2012, efforts accelerated to engage the private sector, from companies to individual investors both within and beyond the region. Central to the business community’s incorporation in the emerging RECCA vision and approach, Afghanistan and its neighbors and the wider region have made steady progress in installing bedrock “software” components from instituting the “bankability” of RECCA’s infrastructure projects to the passage of crucial Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) legislation and regulatory oversight. These steps are also helping to broker private sector investment deals in critical “hardware” components of economic integration in the wider region.

RECCA is expected to become the principal platform for FDI, trade, and infrastructure in the region, which subsequent to the RECCA-VII Ashgabat meeting is now proceeding with full regional and extra regional support for the RECCA 2.0 agenda—including everything from a slate of new initiatives, including the RECCA Chamber of Commerce and Industries (RCCI), a RECCA Center for Research and Evaluation (RCRE), and a Women’s Economic Empowerment Initiative (WEEI), to investment road shows for bankable projects and, ultimately, a regional trade and transit agreement. In the second decade of RECCA, it seeks to be a comprehensive platform for economic integration and commercial exchange, increasingly owned and operated by the people, businesses, and governments of Central and South Asia.

### RECCA’s New Approach

**RECCA 2.0**

1. **RECCA National Focal Points**
   - Pull together and support the various tracks of this new “RECCA 2.0” approach

2. **RECCA Center for Research & Evaluation**
   - To prepare Bankable Project Briefs for Public and Private Investors, as well as undertake other activities like state-of-the-art research and analysis on priority regional matters

3. **RECCA Chamber of Commerce & Industries**
   - To help mobilize governments and national chambers of commerce in support of Investment Road Shows, Business Forums, and wider B2B cooperation

4. **Prioritize Women’s Economic Empowerment**
   - Through Regional Economic Cooperation

5. **Strategic Partnerships**
   - Between RECCA and other regional organizations and initiatives

6. **RECCA Interactive Web-Portal**
   - For Regional Investment Promotion and Knowledge Sharing

7. **Synergies with the Afghan Government’s Infrastructure Development Council**

8. **Moving towards a RECCA Economic Cooperation Strategy**
   - For Central, South, and Southwest Asia
The Central Asia-South Asia Regional Energy Market (CASA-1000) is installing complex transmission infrastructure and the necessary institutional and contractual agreements to facilitate the export of 1300 MW of surplus electricity in summer months from the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The project is deepening regional energy cooperation, increasing electricity trade, and establishing Afghanistan as a viable transit country. The Project Procurement Phase is in near fully completed, with all procurement packages except for the rebidding of a sub portion in Pakistan. The Afghan portion of the transmission Line has been contracted to Indian companies Kalpataru Power Transmission Limited India and KEC International India. The owners engineer to supervise the construction companies’ works has been hired; the procurement of ESIA (Environment and Social Impact Assessment) is in the RFP stage, and the Transmission Line Portion in Afghanistan is in the Detail Survey Stage following which the design will be prepared.

Once considered a pipe dream, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline Project has witnessed considerable progress during this year. Previously, the heads of member countries signed an Inter-Governmental Agreement in 2010 and laid the legal foundation for the project.

In 2013 the members nominated Turkmengaz, AGE, ISGS, and GAIL to promote and invest in the project. Turkmen gas was appointed as Consortium Leader with an 85% equity stake in TPCL, and the remaining 15% share was divided equally among Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. As part of the recent efforts and progress, the clearance of unexploded ordnance was completed in Farah, Nimroz, and Kandahar; environmental and social impact assessments were completed in Pakistan and Afghanistan; the Land Acquisition Plan is 60% complete in Afghanistan and 100% complete in Pakistan; and the Geotechnical Survey is complete in both. Finally, the scope of work has been completed for the procurement of the project financing, and attraction of technical, finance, tax, insurance, legal and other advisers with international experience in financing activities of large projects and meetings were held with 12 well-known companies.

TAP-500 kV Power Project (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) is an important regional energy project in the Central and South Asian energy sector. Via this project, Turkmenistan plans to export year-round power to both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The TAP project transmission lines at the border point will parallel high terrain near Turghundi, fan out to Herat-Farah-Kandahar, extend on to Spin Boldak, and then connect into Pakistan. The length of transmission line in Afghanistan territory is estimated about 750 km; from the project Afghanistan receive an average of 1000 MW of electricity in future. The TAP-500 project’s MoU was signed by the President of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan and Prime Minister of Pakistan in December 2015. In October 2018 the IGA (inter-governmental agreement) of 500 kV TAP project was signed between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, and the TAP Project technical team of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan has been established.

Furthermore, an MoU was signed earlier this month between the Government of Afghanistan and a Turkish company regarding investment in this project.
The proposed railway project connects the railway route among five countries of China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran traversing about 902 km inside Afghanistan. Both pre-feasibility and feasibility studies for the majority of the Afghan segment is now completed. According to an MoU between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on the project “Financing, Design and Construction” of Mazar-e-Sharif-Herat Railway, a total of 657 km of technical and field studies of the project are being prepared. According to the MoU, it is intended to finance the requirements of the project which includes an international consortium with the participation of banks, organizations and countries in the region. Furthermore, the third segment of the Khaf-Herat railway is being completed and is expected to be ready for operation by the end of 2018.

The work on other railway segments inside Afghanistan has also progressed significantly over the past two years. A 13-kilometer railway line connecting the Turghundi Cross Border Station to Serhetabat in Turkmenistan was operationalized in February this year. Furthermore, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have agreed recently to build the 10 km new main & loop railway lines in Aqina cross border station.

After three rounds of technical discussions, the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement was finalized and subsequently signed among Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey on the sidelines RECCA-VII on November 15, 2017 in Ashgabat, marking an important milestone in the collective regional efforts towards greater connectivity and integration.

Once implemented, this flagship agreement will not only enhance regional economic cooperation and connectivity among the contracting parties, but it will also contribute significantly to the Eurasian Continental trade and transport network, creating enormous economic opportunities for the citizens of our countries. The work on the two protocols on rail transportation and visa facilitation are underway. The First Expert Meeting to discuss the implementation of the agreement was convened on April 13, 2018 in Asghabat, Turkmenistan. The Second Expert Meeting is now scheduled to take place on December 2, 2018 in Herat, Afghanistan followed by the ceremony on first pilot shipment through Lapis Lazuli Route on December 7 in Torghundi, Afghanistan.

The Chabahar Corridor Agreement (also known as the Chabahar Agreement) was signed in Tehran (May 2016) by India, Iran, and Afghanistan.

The Chabahar Port is meant to serve as an essential node to a multi-modal transportation network for the movement of goods and passengers between Iran, Afghanistan, and India. During the final phase of its development, the port is expected to be capable of handling 20 million tons of trade annually.

On October 29, 2017, India flagged off the first shipment of wheat bound for Afghanistan via Iran’s Chabahar Port, in which India is a key developer. India will build and operate two berths in Phase 1 of the project, with a total capital investment of $85 million and annual revenue expenditure of $23 million on a 10-year lease. India committed to developing a free-trade area around the port, and finally complete the loop with a $1.6 billion railway line to Zahedan, an Iranian city near the border of southwest Afghanistan. Chabahar Port’s present capacity of 2.5 million MT per annum has been expanded to 8 MT per annum and is expected to reach 20 million MT per annum during the final phase of the project. India has already completed the Zaranj-Delaram highway in Afghanistan, which facilitates connectivity to Kabul, and eventually on to Central Asia. The First Meeting of the Coordination Council between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Republic of India under the Chabahar Agreement was held on October 23, 2018 in Tehran, Iran where the participants discussed measures to implement the Chabahar Agreement including the next steps in drafting and finalizing the relevant protocols.
Regional Economic Growth & Resource Corridors
Building land ports and special economic zones has been pursued as a priority under the broader infrastructure development and trade facilitation efforts. The latest progress made by the Government of Afghanistan includes the development of Kandahar Pilot SEZ project (KSEZ). This project centers on the establishment of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the vicinity of the Kandahar International Airport (KIA), to include other satellite investment areas. The Kandahar Pilot SEZ project is located in one of the most strategic locations in the country in Kandahar Province. Complementary infrastructure involving rail lines and roads connecting production centers with Dry Ports and Rail Depots, involving Container Depots and Container Freight Stations, will focus on enhancing product certification and formalization, and lowering of trade logistics costs.

The project will develop both forward and backward linkages with industrial and mineral value chains, be supported by ancillary investments, and generate spinoff projects. The Afghanistan Airfield Economic Development Commission (AAEDC) prepared a comprehensive SEZ Development Concept, which was approved by the High Economic Council in April 2018. The Independent Land Authority (ARAZI) transferred 200 hectares of land to the AAEDC for KSEZ. A TOR for a Feasibility Study of KSEZ and pre-feasibility study of 6 airfields has been prepared in consultation with the National Procurement Authority (NPA) and awaits to be tendered. KSEZ will be constructed in four different phases—Agri-Business, Mining, Manufacturing, and Services—wherein each phase will be assigned a specific amount of time, land, resources, expertise, and technology in accordance with International Standards. Finally, the bylaws for the SEZ Corporation have been drafted and await approval.

The project consists of upgrading and improving the 152 km Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B 6 Segments) Road; rehabilitating the existing 86km Salang Pass and its 2.8 km Tunnel; and implementing a new O&M modality to sustainably manage these new roads in the future.

The objective is to improve this critical Trans-Hindukush connectivity through providing year-round access that will enhance local and international trade and regional integration. Furthermore, the improved roads will increase security by reducing the time to respond to local, regional or national incidents; facilitate access to social services; and provide new regional trade opportunities including agriculture and mining. The financing agreement was signed in 2015, and the project commenced in 2016. In the last two years the design phase has been completed; the procurement phase is late-stage; and the construction phase is under way. The completion date is expected in 2020.

In 1976 Afghanistan became a member of the TIR Convention, but after decades of conflict the Government of Afghanistan reactivated TIR in July 2011. Afghanistan has established a TIR National Committee under the Ministry of Transport.

The TIR initiative has become one of the Afghan government’s top priorities, and Afghanistan was declared a member of the TIR convention in September 2013. The Ministry of Transport has developed the TIR Parks project, which has been approved by the High Economic Council, and the new Transport law on TIR is now being enforced. The TIR technical committee was established, the TIR regulation is at the finalization stage, and the TIR Implementation Plan has been prepared. Meetings of the TIR National Committee and the TIR Technical Committee have been organized.

The first two shipments under TIR between Afghanistan and Pakistan were conducted last month.

Land Ports & Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

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Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity

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Enhancing regional business-to-business partnership and investment promotion has remained an important priority under both RECCA and HoA-IP.

The initiation of the RECCA Chamber of Commerce and Industries and the Women’s Economic Empowerment Initiative are expected to further facilitate activities in this regard. Building on the success of the previous trade and investment shows under RECCA and HoA-IP as well as other associated initiatives including the Passage-to-Prosperity series held in New Delhi (2017) and Mumbai (2018), preparations are under way to convene dedicated investment roadshow in support of priority regional cooperation and investment projects centering on Afghanistan. Efforts have also been made under RECCA and HoA-IP to help simplify customs measures, addressing information on regional markets, and address tariff and non-tariff barriers, promote business-to-business cooperation strategies tailored to the needs of Small-and-Medium-Sized Industries across the region.

Efforts have been made recently under RECCA to enhance research collaboration across Central, South, and South West Asia with a view to further strengthen regional economic cooperation and integration efforts. In this context, a proposal to establish a RECCA Center for Research and Evaluation (RCRE) was presented to and approved by the participants of the RECCA-VII in Ashgabat.

The Center will focus actively on providing scholarly reviews and analysis on regional economic cooperation in the RECCA region, in order to help promote cooperation in the form of a state-of-the-art information exchange and shared analysis by regional partners. Key analysis of the following types of crucial queries could be regularly produced by the experts assembled at an innovative center of this caliber, such as: How many jobs would be created by a regional trade and transit agreement? How much would the average family’s standard of living improve by the combined impact of regional energy initiatives e.g. TAPI and CASA-1000? What would the multi-level impact be of integrating regional transportation networks e.g. road and rail? The Center will be based at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, and will be inaugurated in early December this year.

Digital Silk Road

The main objective of the Digital Silk Road project is to expand the regional knowledge economy and to allow Afghanistan to serve as an information transit route in the region, increase connectivity within the country, and drive down the cost of internet for everyday users.

As part of the recent efforts, Afghanistan and China have signed an MoU on Cooperation in Information Technologies and Telecommunications, the crux of which is a fiber optic link that will be built in order to connect Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, and China. For the Optical Fiber Network, Afghanistan will install two cores of dark fiber lines from Shirkhan Bandar to Kabul, and will install new equipment with higher capacity along this segment. This connectivity will enable the Central and South Asian countries to exchange information efficiently. The Wakhan digital corridor fiber optic link will be built as a backup for Digital Silk Road. Trench work on Afghan territory is largely completed. Following the connection with Chinese optical fiber, Afghanistan will be able to purchase internet bandwidth with Chinese companies. This will create a competitive environment for purchasing internet services which could reduce cost of internet service here, as well as improve the quality of service.

B2B Partnership & Investment Promotion

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Promoting Research Collaboration

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RECCA
Major Events & Meetings 2017-2018

15 NOVEMBER 2017
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

RECCA-VII
Ministerial Meeting

15 NOVEMBER 2017 — Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
Signing Ceremony of the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement on the sidelines of RECCA-VII

14 NOVEMBER 2017 — Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
RECCA-VII Business Forum and the Special Event on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs; and Exhibition

13 OCTOBER 2017 — Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
RECCA-VII Academic Forum

01 MAR 2017 — Istanbul, Turkey
RECCA Business Forum

13 FEB 2017 — Kabul, Afghanistan
First RECCA Ambassadors’ Coordination Meeting

10 JUL 2017 — Kabul, Afghanistan
Second RECCA Ambassadors’ Coordination Meeting

26 AUG 2017 — Kabul, Afghanistan
First RECCA National Focal Points Meeting

11 SEP 2017 — Kabul, Afghanistan
First RECCA Inter-ministerial Meeting

30 OCT 2017 — Kabul, Afghanistan
Second RECCA Inter-ministerial Meeting

01 NOV 2017 — Kabul, Afghanistan
Third RECCA Ambassadors’ Coordination Meeting

13 NOV 2017 — Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
Second RECCA National Focal Points Meeting

17 APR 2018 — Kabul, Afghanistan
First ‘Friends of RECCA’ Meeting in 2018

02 OCT 2018 — Vienna, Austria
First ‘Friends of RECCA’ Meeting in 2018

07 NOV 2018 — Canberra, Australia
Second ‘Friends of RECCA’ Meeting in 2018
Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process

The Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) continues to reach important milestones. The HoA-IP was founded in November, 2011. The Heart of Asia provides a platform for results-oriented regional cooperation by placing Afghanistan at its center, in recognition of the fact that a secure and stable Afghanistan is vital to the prosperity of the Heart of Asia region. This platform was established to address the shared challenges and interests of Afghanistan and its neighbors and regional partners. The Heart of Asia is comprised of 15 participating countries (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan), 16 supporting countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, European Union, France, Finland, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States), and 12 supporting regional and international organizations (UN, AKDN, CAREC/ADB, CICA, SAARC, CSTO, ECO, NATO, OIC, OSCE, SCO, and EU).

HoA-IP is an important platform for enhancing dialogue and building trust among regional countries. The HoA-IP promotes regional political, security, and economic cooperation with the goal of building peace, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan and the entire region. HoA-IP has three main pillars, which work together to build regional consensus on how Afghanistan and its regional partners can achieve their shared objectives. They include: 1) Political Consultations 2) Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), and 3) Cooperation with Regional Organizations. Progress on the CBMs is where HoA has been most effective, with shared responsibility for the economic CBMs taking place with RECCA. Whereas the primary emphasis of HoA-IP is on political and security issues, the primary emphasis of RECCA is on economics and finance.

The HoA-IP meets at the ministerial level annually, and produces a political outcome document called "HoA-IP Ministerial Declaration." Moreover, senior officials, ambassadors, and experts-level meetings are organized on a regular basis to hold political consultations, as well as follow up on the implementation of decisions of the ministerial conferences.

To pursue the regional cooperation agenda in 2012 Ministerial Conference held in Kabul, following six priority areas were prioritized as Confidence Building Measures (CBMs):

1. Counter-terrorism CBM (led by Afghanistan, Turkey and UAE);
2. Counter-narcotics CBM (led by Azerbaijan and Russian Federation);
3. Regional Infrastructure CBM (Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan);
4. Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities CBM (led by India);
5. Disaster Management CBM (led by Kazakhstan and Pakistan); and
6. Culture and Education CBM (led by Iran)

Participating countries voluntarily host and co-chair the Ministerial conferences along with Afghanistan as the permanent chair and coordinator of the HoA-IP. Seven Ministerial Conferences have been held and hosted by Turkey in 2011, Afghanistan in 2012, Kazakhstan in 2013, China in 2014, Pakistan in 2015, India in 2016 and Azerbaijan in 2017. Currently, Turkey is the co-chair and host of the 8th Ministerial Conference.

Highlights of Recent Progress

After the Brussels Conference, two HoA-IP Ministerial Conferences have been organized in India on 3-4 December 2016 and in Azerbaijan on 30 November — 1 December 2017 with strong commitments reflected in the declarations. Meanwhile, based on the need for effective follow up and coordination, two annual reports were presented with some specific recommendations by Afghanistan.

The main outcomes of the decisions and recommendations were as follows:

- Initiation of discussions on the draft of the Heart of Asia Counter-terrorism Strategy
- Inclusion of ‘culture’ in the Education CBM
- A new CBM on ‘Agriculture Development’
- Revision of the Implementation Plans of all six CBMs
- Joining of Uzbekistan in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process
- Appointment of Afghanistan’s National Focal Points for CBMs
Regional Technical Group Meetings
Under six CBMs, the lead countries have convened the following Regional Technical Group Meetings (RTGs) and events:

1. Training workshop on Radicalization, Terrorism in the Universities for Counter Terrorism authorities of the Heart of Asia Countries, 08-09 November 2016, Ankara - Turkey;

2. RTG Meeting of the Disaster Management CBM, 09 December 2016, Astana - Kazakhstan;

3. RTG Meeting of the Culture & Education CBM (Ed-CBM), 08 March 2017, Tehran – Iran;

4. RTG Meeting of the Regional Infrastructure CBM (RI-CBM), 03 April 2017, Ashgabat – Turkmenistan;

5. RTG Meeting of the Trade, Commerce, and Investment Opportunities CBM (TCIO-CBM), 07 August 2017, New Delhi – India;

6. The Belt and Road field visit, 06-14 May 2017, People’s Republic of China;

7. RTG Meeting of the Counter Narcotics CBM (CN-CBM), 10 November 2017, Baku – Azerbaijan;

8. RTG Meeting of Regional Infrastructure CBM (RI-CBM), 27 November 2017, Baku – Azerbaijan;


10. RTG Meeting of the Disaster Management CBM (DM CBM), 22 June 2018, Islamabad – Pakistan;

11. RTG Meeting of Culture & Education CBM (Ed-CBM), 27 August 2018, Tehran – Iran;

12. RTG Meeting of Trade, Commerce, and Investment Opportunities CBM (TCIO-CBM), 20 September 2018, New Delhi – India;

13. The Belt and Road field visit, 14-21 October 2018, People’s Republic of China;

14. RTG Meeting of Counter Narcotics CBM (CN-CBM), 31 October 2018, Moscow – Russia;

15. RTG Meeting of Counter Terrorism CBM (CT-CBM), 14 November 2018, Abu Dhabi – UAE.

Priorities in 2018
The following are the priorities to be accomplished as part of the planned activities of the HoA-IP which will be ready for approval and endorsement of the 8th HoA-IP Ministerial Conference:

- Revision of all CBMs Implementation Plans: The prime objective for the revision of the implementation plans is to improve, update, redefin and re-prioritize the existing texts of CBMs implementation plans in order to align them with our national and regional priorities with a view to enhance the effectiveness of activities, and identify challenges, opportunities and solutions to the current problems and challenges. Last but not least, to increase the utility, relevance and impact of CBMs

- Finalization of Agriculture Development CBM Implementation Plan: Due to the immense importance of agriculture in economic development of Afghanistan and regional countries, Afghanistan proposed this new CBM. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan will be leading this new CBM and India, Turkey, Australia and UNODC will be participating in this CBM

- Preparing and finalizing the HoA-IP Working Guidelines: The working guideline is intended to provide overall guidance, and facilitate the smooth carrying out of the secretarial tasks and activities

- Finalizing the draft concept note on sharing the progress of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process activities and outcomes to the UN with the possibility of a draft resolution recognizing the process: This was decided by the Senior Officials Meeting of the HoA-IP on 19 April, 2018 with a view to increase recognition and visibility of regional cooperation efforts made by HoA-IP countries under the framework focused on Afghanistan and enhance further cooperation with other UN member states.
### Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process

#### Major Events & Meetings 2017-2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARCH 2017</strong> — Baku, Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Senior Officials Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SEPTEMBER 2017</strong> — New York, United States</td>
<td>Senior Officials Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DECEMBER 2017</strong> — Baku, Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Seventh Ministerial Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>APRIL 2018</strong> — Istanbul, Turkey</td>
<td>Senior Officials Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SEPTEMBER 2018</strong> — New York, United States</td>
<td>Senior Officials Meeting</td>
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</table>

**2017 Events**
- **08 MAR 2017** — Tehran, Iran
  RTG Meeting of the Culture & Education CBM (Ed-CBM)
- **03 APR 2017** — Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
  RTG Meeting of the Regional Infrastructure CBM (RI-CBM)
- **07 AUG 2017** — New Delhi, India
  RTG Meeting of the Trade, Commerce, and Investment Opportunities CBM (TCIO-CBM)
- **06-14 MAY 2017** — People’s Republic of China
  The Belt and Road field visit
- **10 NOV 2017** — Baku, Azerbaijan
  RTG Meeting of Counter Narcotics CBM (CN-CBM)
- **28 NOV – 01 DEC 2017** — Ankara, Turkey
  Training Program on “Financial Aspects of Combating Terrorism”
- **22 JUN 2018** — Islamabad, Pakistan
  RTG Meeting of Disaster Management CBM (DM CBM)
- **27 AUG 2018** — Tehran, Iran
  RTG Meeting of Culture & Education CBM (Ed-CBM)
- **20 SEP 2018** — New Delhi, India
  RTG Meeting of Trade, Commerce, and Investment Opportunities CBM (TCIO-CBM)
- **14 NOV 2018** — Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
  RTG Meeting of Counter Narcotics CBM (CN-CBM)
- **31 OCT 2018** — Moscow, Russia
  RTG Meeting of Counter Narcotics CBM (CN-CBM)
- **14 NOV 2018** — Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
  RTG Meeting of Counter Terrorism CBM (CT-CBM)
Both RECCA and HoA-IP emphasize the important role of the regional organizations covering different combinations of their country members. Both platforms highlight the role of Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (UNSPECA), and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program, in the context of cooperation towards enhanced security and economic development in the region.

Furthermore, they both promote Afghanistan’s active participation in the regional organizations it is currently a member of, including SAARC, ECO, CICA, ACD, UNSPECA and CAREC. The HoA-IP seeks to harness the role of key Heart of Asia countries on security and economic matters in the region by supporting or complementing efforts made under the SCO and other regional mechanisms and processes. HoA-IP can also strengthen ECO and CAREC.

Likewise RECCA has sought to actively encourage a convergence in approaches on shared priorities with other regional organizations and initiatives, such as SAARC, CAREC, ECO, UNESCAP, OSCE, SCO, the Belt-and Road Initiative, and the Middle Corridor. Following an initial meeting of the heads of the secretariats of regional organizations to which Afghanistan is a member in 2010 in Kabul, a second such meeting was convened on the sidelines of RECCA-VI in 2015 in Kabul, and the following organizations attended RECCA-VII in 2017 in Ashgabad: UN, AKDN, CAREC, CICA, CSTO, ECO, NATO, OIC, OSCE, SAARC, SCO, ADB, WB, and the EU.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAEDC</td>
<td>Afghanistan Airfield Economic Development Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACD</td>
<td>Asia Cooperation Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>AKDN</td>
<td>Aga Khan Development Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>Afghanistan Gas Enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARAZI</td>
<td>Afghanistan Independent Land Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>B2B</td>
<td>Business-to-business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAREC</td>
<td>Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA</td>
<td>Central Asia—South Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBMs</td>
<td>Confidence-building Measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CICA</td>
<td>Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTO</td>
<td>Collective Security Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAIL</td>
<td>Gas (India) Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>HoA-IP</td>
<td>Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGA</td>
<td>Inter-governmental Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISGS</td>
<td>Inter State Gas Systems (pvt) Ltd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>Kandahar International Airport</td>
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<tr>
<td>KSEZ</td>
<td>Kandahar Special Economic Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Metric ton</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPA</td>
<td>National Procurement Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>O&amp;M</td>
<td>Operations and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIC</td>
<td>Organisation of Islamic Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Public Private Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCCI</td>
<td>RECCA Chamber of Commerce and Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCRE</td>
<td>RECCA Center for Research &amp; Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RECCA</td>
<td>Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFP</td>
<td>Request for Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTG</td>
<td>Regional Technical Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAARC</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCO</td>
<td>Shanghai Cooperation Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEZs</td>
<td>Special Economic Zones</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAP</td>
<td>Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAPI</td>
<td>Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIR</td>
<td>International Road Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPCL</td>
<td>TAPI Pipeline Company Ltd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCAP</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNOPS</td>
<td>United Nations Office for Project Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSPECA</td>
<td>United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEEI</td>
<td>Women’s Economic Empowerment Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The potential of Afghanistan as a hub of regional energy trade is no longer pipe dream but a rapidly unfolding reality. We are making weekly progress on expanding the national grid, to provide the power to drive the engines of growth. Regional transit agreements are linking us to China, Caucuses in Europe and air corridors are fast expanding, thereby gradually lowering the costs of transport and access to the export economy.

H.E. Dr. Ashraf Ghani
President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Speaking at the 18th SCO Summit in Qingdao, China (June 10, 2018)