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REMARKS

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini following the EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting

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Thank you very much. We had a very good meeting this afternoon with our Central Asian partners, and I would like to thank my friend, Foreign Minister Idrissov, for generous hospitality.

This is the 11th ministerial since the EU Central Asia Strategy was adopted in 2007. It is also my first EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting and it is the first meeting we have since the revised Strategy was adopted this past summer: adopted not just as a document, not just as a paper, but as a strong sign of political investment by all EU Member States, by all European institutions, to the fact that we want to invest in a strategic partnership, in a strategic relationship with Central Asia.

We have the clear idea of the fact that what happens in this region of the world is key and extremely important for the European Union, and that we have many common points for cooperation for the benefit of our people both in the European Union and in Central Asia. Only through more effective cooperation, only through a strengthened cooperation can we solve some of the challenges we have and take full advantage of the many opportunities our regions have.

The Minister already highlighted the major points of our discussion. Let me stress the fact that we had an intense exchange, first in bilateral meetings - for which I am very grateful - with all the Ministers and Deputy Ministers that are present here today and in our two joint sessions of work.

On the one side, on the common fields of cooperation, focussing especially on education, on environment, on climate change, on investment and trade and on energy: all fields where both Central Asia and the European Union can benefit a lot from an enhanced cooperation. And we are - as the Minister was saying - going back to our capitals with a lot of energy and good ideas to follow up from here to the next meeting.

We also discussed and decided how to strengthen our cooperation in the field of security and stability, because we are going through difficult times in the world, especially to counter radicalisation of our youth both in Europe, around the Mediterranean, in the Middle East and in Central Asia, and far away compared to this - also in far East Asia and other regions of the world, including Australia and the US. It is a global challenge, but together we have more instruments to face this and to prevent this threat to all of us than we have separately.

We have discussed concrete options for counter terrorism and security cooperation and also some ideas on how to work together on one regional issue - that is also a high priority for the European Union - which is the situation in Afghanistan and how to continue to keep Afghanistan high on the international agenda.

In Brussels, we will co-host together with our Afghan friends a conference on the future of Afghanistan next year. I personally invited all the Ministers present here today to not only join the meeting in Brussels, but

also to work together with us to prepare in the best possible way the political content of this conference, because we also discussed today about how to involve Afghanistan in this regional cooperation which is something that could become extremely important and useful.

We also discussed the current economic challenges the regions goes through, especially with the drop in commodities' prices and the need for diversification and investments, especially on human capital and the innovation sector on which we can have deep cooperation.

I passed to all the Ministers the message that the European Union is there, not just to help but to accompany, to assist, to cooperate in these times that are very difficult for everybody here and we are together in this as partners, as friends.

Finally, we also have agreed in our Joint Communique that democratisation, respect for human rights and the rule of law are also fundamentally important for the socio-economic development and also for the business climate, for the investment climate and that strong civil society is also an important element for a successful economy and also for a secure environment.

As the Minister mentioned, I had the pleasure at the end of our meeting to invite all the Foreign Ministers to Brussels in 2016 to continue our EU-Central Asia ministerial cooperation following up the very good discussions and ideas we have had today.

Thank you very much.

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