**EU joint statement issued, on behalf of the EU Member States, the Kingdom of Norway and the Swiss Confederation, during the Heart of Asia Senior Officials' Meeting**

**Beijing, 10 July 2014**

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

Today as we are preparing the Heart of Asia Ministerial, we should seize this opportunity to bring positive momentum to Afghanistan and its new Government. As we move through transition, the Ministerial should send a positive message of solidarity between the peoples of the region. We would like to thank the People's Republic of China for hosting this Senior Officials Meeting and the upcoming Heart of Asia Ministerial, in August. The Heart of Asia Ministerial in August will be an important occasion for the countries in the region to show their commitment to the then newly inaugurated President of Afghanistan to intensify cooperation between them. The EU, its Member States, the Kingdom of Norway and the Swiss Confederation encourage all countries in the region to invest political capital into this process and we stand ready to support such efforts.

The Ministerial's focus on promoting peace and reconciliation will provide a platform for the Heart of Asia countries to show their political commitment towards the stability of the whole region. This endeavour to advance the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process will send an important signal. Lasting security requires an inclusive process leading to a political settlement, eschewing violence, cutting links with terrorism and respecting human rights, including the rights of women. Encouraging political dialogue and enhancing mutual trust remains important. The benefits of peace and lasting security for the whole region cannot be under-estimated, with the healthy development of the Afghan economy currently impeded by insecurity. Insecurity also enables the drug trade. Improving rural livelihood opportunities and stimulate the rural economy to generate more jobs is an important factor in reducing the dependency on narcotics cultivation. Afghanistan's neighbours can only gain from a peaceful, prosperous, and unified Afghanistan.

The Heart of Asia Ministerial will be the first of three key conferences that will shape the beginning of Afghanistan's transformation decade. It will be important that the meeting is successful in setting the constructive tone for the two subsequent Ministerial meetings. In September, the NATO Summit will focus on security and in November the London Ministerial on the mutual commitments between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to support sustainable development. Both security and sustainable development are clearly linked to regional integration.

The EU, its Member States, the Kingdom of Norway and the Swiss Confederation, believe that Afghanistan's inter-connecting role within the wider region can provide solutions promoting sustainable development, combating narcotics, addressing energy shortages, stimulating inclusive economic growth, and regional trade. We believe that these opportunities can lead to greater integration, greater prosperity and more people to people connections that will increase the stability of both Afghanistan and the wider region.