Message of Federica Mogherini, EU HR/VP

Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, issued the following statement:

The EU strongly supports SAARC and greatly values co-operation and regional integration in South Asia. While most countries in the region are achieving notable economic growth this could still be significantly enhanced if intra-regional contacts and trade were to take off unhindered. A clear vision for South Asia complemented by sustained efforts around regional cooperation and connectivity could help make the region even more vibrant economically.

We trust that the EU, as the only regional body that has observer status in SAARC, can contribute usefully to enhancing regional cooperation in South Asia through our role as development partner in the region, and through our own experience of economic and trade integration and of dealing with diversity.

As part of our international development cooperation programme the EU has allocated more than € 3 billion to the SAARC region for the period 2014-2020. The EU also warmly welcomes the role that is given to the observer countries in contributing to the SAARC Process.

SAARC provides an excellent opportunity to foster greater connectivity, integration and progress in South Asia. The progress made so far towards regional integration needs to be further consolidated in the near future through the building of mutual trust. The future of SAARC largely relies on how its members narrow down their differences and build a common understanding to pursue the set goals of economic development and regionalism. All members have an important role to play.

SAARC needs a clear roadmap to ensure there is a strong connectivity amongst the people of the region and that key infrastructural initiatives, such as customs facilities, railways, air services, ports and roads, are developed in each country and regionally.

But SAARC will only be able to bring positive changes in the lives of its citizens if it succeeds to further liberalize inter-regional trade going beyond the SAFTA provisions. Joint investments in water resources and the installation of a regional power grid are top priorities – and the promotion of regional tourism, greater cultural exchanges, and unhindered and effective communication, also need special attention. The development of robust regional educational and health networks and adequate people to people contacts backed by ‘good neighbourly’ diplomacy will also change things for the better.

Let me conclude by wishing the 18th SAARC Summit all success in its endeavours and in the definition of its future programmes for a secure and prosperous South Asia.
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