

Statement by H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of

Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

International Afghanistan Conference

Bonn, December 5, 2011

Dear Mr. Chairman, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan,
Honorable Host, the Foreign Minister of Germany,

Let me thank you for all the hard work than has been put in preparing this Conference, which is bound to have a historic significance.

We have arrived in Bonn with a common goal of reaffirming our long term commitment to the future of Afghanistan and to peaceful development of the region as a whole. This goal has asked for outstanding efforts of the Afghani people and the international community. It has taken great sacrifice from all nations involved, including loss of life. This means that there is only one way forward – and that is to ensure that the positive change that has taken place in Afghanistan is irreversible.

This Conference presents an excellent and timely opportunity to reaffirm our common vision of successful development of Afghanistan until 2014 and, indeed, for decades to come. It is a commitment to work for a stable, democratic, prosperous and peaceful future for the people of Afghanistan, based on our ideals, aspirations and shared values. We see the future Afghanistan as a sovereign and rightful member of the international community and we shall work together in order to achieve it.

Latvia highly welcomes the recent announcement of President Hamid Karzai to commence the second stage in the transition of provinces and districts to the responsibility of Afghani forces. The fact that the transition will now cover over half of the population of Afghanistan is impressive and testifies of the progress that has been made over the past years.

Latvia is committed to fulfilling our duty as an active and responsible participant of the ISAF effort in Faryab province. We are prepared to remain in the country as long as the situation

requires it and the Government of Afghanistan sees it fit. Moreover, we are ready to continue our involvement in Afghanistan beyond the transition in other acceptable forms based on NATO Enduring Partnership with Afghanistan.

Equally, we realize the necessity to strengthen civilian involvement and participation in joint international projects and we are looking for ways and means of upgrading this involvement.

As a member of the European Union we have fully supported granting of mandate for opening of negotiations between the EU and Afghanistan on Cooperation and Development Agreement that would put the relations between the EU and Afghanistan on a substantially new level. We also share the EU commitment in the form of EUPOL and its contribution to civilian policing.

Today everybody realizes that a military component and enhancing of the overall security of the country should go hand in hand with advancing social and economic change and democratic governance. In this regard I would particularly like

to stress the importance of regional cooperation. The prospect for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is to be sought in close ties between all of its direct and more distant neighbors. Global and regional organizations, international donors can all play a vital part in it.

Latvia like many here around this table applauds the Istanbul process launched last month and trusts that it will serve regional confidence building and in advancing change.

Bearing this in mind, I would like to stress that Latvia finds the Silk Road initiative especially promising. It does not call for creation of unnecessary structures, but rather stands as a concept for generating growth, peace and prosperity through increased regional cooperation and interdependence. It cannot be overemphasized that it should go hand in hand with enhanced security. The Silk Road initiative can become a substantial element in the efforts of promoting security, stability and sustainable economic development in Central and South Asian

region. Implementation of the Silk Road initiative would benefit:

- All countries involved;
- Development of regional cooperation;
- Promotion of long-term stability and prosperity in the region;
- Development of conditions for reestablishing Afghanistan's traditional role as a hub of transport and trade.

We should take a very practical approach and jointly look at the ways we can do away with legal and administrative obstacles that hamper mutual trade, infrastructural or transit projects.

Since 2009 Latvia has accumulated significant experience, providing the entry point of the Northern Distribution Network and supporting efforts for alternative supply routes and the establishment of the successful transit to Afghanistan. The Government of Latvia invites key partners to transform the Silk

Road idea from a theoretical concept to a businesslike pilot project.

In this regard Latvia proposes convening a working level meeting in Riga next April and would like to invite everyone interested to participate. We have circulated a working paper on this initiative.

I wish everyone productive work at this conference and I am convinced in the success of our common endeavors.