**REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN**

**NATIONAL Development COUNCIL AND**

**DEVELOPMENT Forum**

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**STATEMENT BY MR. HIDAJET BISCEVIC**

**EU AMBASSADOR TO TAJIKISTAN**

Mr President,

Ministers, Ambassadors, Development Partners, honoured participants,

It is indeed an honour and privilege to be able to address this important session of the National Development Council on behalf of the European Union.

The European Union joins other development partners in recognizing that Tajikistan is currently facing a challenging, but promising period in its economic, social and political life.

I have arrived here almost four years ago and have witnessed challenges, sometimes even threats, but also the changes. Navigating through a dire straits of external and internal agendas and legacies, Tajikistan's authorities and leadership managed to ensure stability and security whilst gradually move forward country's economy and social life. Becoming a bit of a Tajik myself, I feel the country has reached a point when a new opening is called for, when new strategic steps are to be taken – indeed, it seems that after the initial period of independence, after the unfortunate Civil War and after the post-conflict management of reconciliation and rehabilitation, the time has come for a fourth period in the development of the country. A period of lifting-up the Tajik economy to a new level of self-sustainable performance and of social modernization, in order to make the best of the human potential of this young and energetic country.

This historical task will need to be taken against the background of a challenging international environment, full of un-predictabilities, whereby we witness that nations and regions become victims of this current multiple competitive disorder. But, this strategic endeavour is surely the best way to invest into the country`s durable security and stability – a stronger, more developed and self-relying economy and society at peace with itself, energized around the common goal, is the best dam against uncertainties of today`s world.

I used the word "dam" with purpose – soon, the Roghun Dam will start to operate and it would seem to me that this will mark exactly the point I made: periods of struggling and surviving are to be left behind, periods of building and growing are to be expected.

New signs of regional opening are additionally conducive for Tajiks' efforts to move the country forward. New readiness for better regional cooperation will hopefully provide for overall advancement of Central Asia in economic and social development, but also ensuring common approaches to various security challenges. The region's readiness to assist in overcoming security and development challenges in a broader region, including Afghanistan, is a reflection of a new level of responsibility and of a long-term strategic vision.

European Union stood beside Tajikistan in the times of difficulties and crisis and we are ready to support Tajikistan now, when a genuine chance for a positive transformation of the national economic model is within reach.

We are honoured to be Tajikistan's partner in the implementation of the National Development Strategy 2016-2030. The EU – together with other development partners – has always emphasized the importance of a political commitment on the part of the leadership of the country to not only address the current economic challenges, but also to build a new basis for Tajikistan's long-term economic and social development.

The National Development Strategy 2016 – 2030, in our mind, should be used as a strong driver for change, a landmark platform and a starting point for a new model of growth, competitiveness and self-sustainability.

It provides a vision, and this vision needs to be accompanied by liberalisation, by improved and reformed administrative capacities and functioning institutions, comprehensive strategic planning and efficient management of public finances, a stronger rule of law, an enhanced investment climate, sustained support for small and medium enterprises, and improvements in social sectors.

We strongly believe that strengthening Tajikistan's national economy and the country's social cohesion will be the most important assets to national security and long-term development and prosperity, **opening also new perspectives for political pluralism, human rights and social inclusiveness.**

The fact that Tajikistan has decided to shape its National Development Strategy 2016-2030 within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals is very symbolic. Tajikistan thereby puts its visions in a greater political context, and this testifies to the importance of political will and leadership that is required to achieve its goals.

Indeed, strong political will, visionary leadership, persistent and focused work and unity around this new development driver will be essential. Development partners can only help where there is a genuine domestic will.

We are already working on EU engagement in the implementation of the NDS. This we will do on the basis of the current EU Multiannual Indicative Programme which, in fact, covers the period until 2020 and very much corresponds with the Government`s priorities in this first phase of NDS implementation: education, health and rural development. In more specific terms, we are supporting a project on budgeting and planning in the health sector (potentially to be replicated to other social sectors), and we are planning a programme focusing on harmonisation of rural development policies including planning and budgeting at the local level.

The European Union has of course already a long-standing relationship with Tajikistan's Government.

The challenges facing Tajikistan have been discussed at many instances over the last few months, including during European Development Commissioner Mimica's visit to Dushanbe at the occasion of the recent Water Conference, which included also a very fruitful meetings with the President and governmental officials. I am particularly satisfied with the agreement to already start assessing the EU development assistance to future Tajikistan`s development priority areas after 2020.

We also had in-depth discussions during the February session of the EU – Tajikistan Development Cooperation Subcommittee (first time in the history of our relations), and during the March session of the EU – Tajikistan Cooperation Committee.

In relation to this dialogue, we are considering resuming our budget support operations in Tajikistan, both linked to the ongoing support in the fields of health and social protection, and to possible new support in the fields of health and education/professional training. This will however require a very strong commitment of Tajikistan to solve the still outstanding issues in the financial sector and to ensure stability oriented macroeconomic policies.

Let me once more stress that the National Development Strategy can only thrive in a stable, transparent and trustful domestic environment. Development partners stand ready to support a new momentum to address these critically important issues, adding to the commitment of Tajik authorities.

**Mr President, dear participants,**

We recognize that current challenges are offering a new opportunity.

**We recognize that the future offers new potentials. This country is at the threshold of new stage of its development. We also know that it calls for hard work and tough commitments. Because, as we know from our own experiences in the EU, forward moving strategies and brave reforms in the end pay off.**

We stand ready to support you and to assist you in this crucial endeavour. We know that by assisting the development of Tajikistan we are also investing in security and stability in this region and far beyond.

Thank you for your attention.