

## **Press Release**

### **“Europe’s Engagement in Afghanistan”**

The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organized a public talk under its Distinguished Lecture Series titled, “Europe’s Engagement in Afghanistan” on October 4, 2011.

The speaker, a distinguished German scholar, Dr Christian Wagner, Head of the Asia Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, gave an insightful and comprehensive overview of the European Union’s role, policy and commitment in Afghanistan.

In his welcome address, former chairman ISSI and former Foreign Minister, Mr Inam ul Haq, introduced Dr Wagner as an old friend of Pakistan as well as an expert on South Asia. Speaking about the lecture, he said that Afghanistan was of particular interest to Pakistan not only because both countries share a border, but more importantly because all foreign forces intend to leave the country in 2014, thus allowing Afghanistan to once again become an independent state and rightfully regain its sovereign status.

Dr. Martin Axmann, Resident Representative, Hanns Siedel Foundation, in his welcome remarks stated that the topic of Dr Wagner’s lecture is an issue that still continues to be ignored in Pakistan, and among the media, government, academics etc; the Afghan imbroglio tends to be viewed as a Pakistan – US – Afghanistan affair. However, Dr. Axmann was optimistic that the talk would help highlight the fact that Europe is heavily engaged and committed to Afghanistan’s future. It has an important role to play not only in the transition process but also beyond 2014.

In his lecture, Dr Christian Wagner began by saying that after 9/11 and with the establishment of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, Europe has been heavily engaged in Afghanistan. The stabilization and development of Afghanistan is a major external priority for the European Union (EU), which has contributed more than 4 billion Euros to Afghanistan. The thrust of the European assistance has gradually shifted from humanitarian assistance and support for reconstruction towards development cooperation aimed at supporting priorities set out in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Highlighting EU assistance in Afghanistan since 2002, Dr. Wagner explained that the emphasis has primarily focused on governance, infrastructure, agriculture, rural development, health and social protection reforms. Apart from this, he also highlighted several other EC projects in the areas of animal health, horticulture, irrigation and river basin management as well as the environment, support capacity development of relevant Afghan administration institutions, and the improvement of veterinary services, agricultural productivity, water and environmental management and demining.

Although the European Union continues to be one of the biggest donors in Afghanistan after the US, it continues to face many challenges inside the country. The EU, he said, comprised of different actors with diverging views and although there are disagreements among many member states regarding Afghanistan, the EU's commitment to Afghanistan is long term and beyond 2014. He was of the opinion that 2014 should not be regarded as an end to international support to Afghanistan but merely the beginning. Mistakes made in the past particularly after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 would not be repeated. Highlighting the role of major contributing states like the UK, France, Italy and Germany, he said that the role his country, Germany, has played in helping to bring stability to Afghanistan had shown typical German commitment.

Speaking about the Lisbon Conference on Afghanistan he said that although NATO has been actively involved in Afghanistan since 2001 and the fact that the transition process has begun with Afghan security forces have taken responsibility for the control of seven provinces, this remains a step by step process that would finish by 2014. It was made eminently clear at the conference that the international forces and particularly the EU would remain indefinitely in what is being portrayed as NATO-Afghan partnership.

The event was concluded after an enlightening question and answer session and closing remarks by Mr Inam ul Haq.