

**Speech to be delivered by Mr Sebastiano Mori on occasion of the Briefing on “The main Results of Uzbekistan’s Presidency in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization” held at the Press Club, 27 June 2016**

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Dear Excellencies, Dear Friends of Uzbekistan, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Institute for Asian Studies, I would like to congratulate Uzbekistan for the effective work it has carried out during its SCO chairmanship at a time when the organization celebrates its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Uzbekistan has made a significant contribution to improving the effectiveness of the organization, strengthening its regulatory framework, and ensuring security and stability in the region.

During this period, and thanks in large part to the consistent efforts of Uzbekistan, SCO has become an influential regional institution and one of the pillars of Eurasian integration. The previous periods of Uzbekistan’s presidency produced meaningful solutions.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> Uzbek Chairmanship, the Executive Committee of the Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS) began to function in Tashkent. This permanent agency has become an effective tool and platform for combining efforts and practical cooperation between law enforcement bodies and special services of the SCO member states in the fight against radical, violent extremism and separatism, organized crime. During the second presidency of Uzbekistan, a Joint Declaration on Cooperation was signed between the Secretariats of the United Nations and the SCO, which marked the beginning of official cooperation between the two organizations which created a solid foundation for joint efforts in addressing urgent issues.

Under the current Uzbek SCO Presidency, SCO has signed Memoranda of Understanding with Cambodia to achieve the status of dialogue partner, as well as with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nepal. I am certain that the current chairmanship of the country will leave a mark in the history of the organization.

In a rapidly changing and volatile international situation, we are seeing increasing geopolitical tensions and a rise in terrorism, separatism and extremism. The Islamic State has recruited a large number of people in the Central Asian region, and the possibility that terrorist activities will originate from these nations is on the rise), the summit made concrete steps to safeguard regional stability. As such, the Summit underlined enhanced

cooperation and improvement of mechanisms for cooperation in combating terrorism, illicit trafficking in arms and drugs, illegal migration and human trafficking, and other regional security challenges such as the security vacuum in Afghanistan.

With Pakistan and India as new members, long-standing bilateral conflicts, such as Kashmir and Sino-Indian border disputes, will become part of the SCO agenda. At the same time, the SCO's geographical expansion into South Asia will increase the potential for multifaceted cooperation – notably in security and energy matters.

Regional inter-connectivity was also high on the agenda, in particular the alignments of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and the China-led One Belt One Road Initiative. China, for example, has called on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS Development Bank to support SCO projects.

Separately, a few days before the SCO Summit, visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Uzbek counterpart, Islam Karimov, inaugurated the Qamchiq Tunnel in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley, the longest in Central Asia measuring almost 20 km, part of the Angren-Pap line. This should eventually form part of a network passing through Kyrgyzstan and into China. Evidently, the promotion of land transport connectivity is indeed an important part of OBOR.

While, thus far, SCO has largely focused on regional non-traditional security governance and particularly the fight against terrorism and extremism, achieving tangible results, some greater focus is perhaps needed on some issues such as water management. The lack of financial resources is a key problem but the announcement of the creation of a SCO Development Bank should alleviate this problem to an extent.

The socio-economic dimension of SCO activities has also become more diversified, with people-to-people contacts having emerged as a core interest and the creation of a SCO university added to the SCO agenda. Furthermore, SCO member states have also made headways in energy and telecommunication cooperation.

As for the European Union, while there are no official relations between the EU and the SCO, there is room for the EU to pragmatically engage with the SCO on human security issues, the fight against transnational crime and border security.

I thank you very much for your attention,