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PRESS RELEASE**OSCE to send election support team to Afghanistan for presidential election**

VIENNA, 2 April 2009 - The OSCE's participating States agreed today to send an election support team to Afghanistan for the country's presidential and provincial council elections, accepting an invitation from Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta.

The OSCE Permanent Council decision, adopted by the required consensus, said the Organization would send a team "as an extraordinary measure, in response to the specific request of the Government of Afghanistan". Afghanistan is one of the OSCE's 11 Partners for Co-operation, and directly borders the OSCE region in Central Asia.

"The OSCE has proven expertise in the field of elections, and it is my firm belief that the Organization, along with other international actors, will be able to support Afghanistan in a meaningful way ahead of the country's important elections on 20 August," said Ambassador Mara Marinaki of Greece, the Chairperson of the Permanent Council.

The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, attended the international conference on Afghanistan in The Hague on 31 March, where she emphasized that engagement in Afghanistan remains high on the Greek OSCE Chairmanship agenda.

The OSCE election support team will prepare a report on the electoral process that will include recommendations to the Afghan government on how the country's future elections, legal framework and procedures can be improved.

In 2004, the ODIHR sent an election support team to Afghanistan for the presidential election. The Organization also sent an election support team to the parliamentary and provincial council elections in 2005. In both cases, the ODIHR produced recommendations.

The Permanent Council is one of the main regular decision-making bodies of the 56-country OSCE. It convenes weekly in Vienna to discuss developments in the Organization's area and to make appropriate decisions.

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