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Brussels, **03 SEP. 2013**
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Ms Ana Maria Gomes MEP
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Ana,

Thank you for your letter of 17 July outlining your concerns about security contracting at our Delegation in Kabul. Kabul is one of the most challenging of security environments and we need to ensure that our staff is well protected and that any security services that we contract are professionally competent and administratively sound.

I share your desire to ensure that Private Security Companies (PSCs) adhere to best practice and I am pleased to say that we require all our security providers to be compliant with the Montreux Document and the International Code of Conduct (ICoC).

We require our contractors to submit regular detailed reports on their implementation of our security contracts. The EEAS uses these reports to monitor compliance with the ICoC and the report serves as a basis for periodic audits conducted on the security contractor for aspects such as training, weapons and ammunition stocks and storage, internal management and treatment and employment conditions of security staff.

You raise concerns about the integrity and performance of Page Protective Security (PPS). The Commission internal audit services (IAC) reviewed PPS's Kabul operation, in particular issues relating to equipment and invoicing, following concerns that were raised in 2010. Following an investigation, OLAF closed the file 23 January 2013. We have taken on board all their recommendations to improve monitoring of the implementation of such complex contracts and to recover overpayments. I can confirm that the various issues that they identified have been addressed to our satisfaction and that PPS's operation performance has been effective. There is no legal basis for us denying PPS the opportunity to bid for the new contract.

The tender process for the new contract was somewhat complex, reflecting the increasingly difficult operating environment for PSCs in Afghanistan, but I am confident that the integrity and thoroughness of the process was in line with EU procurement rules. The contract value is consistent with what we expected.

The tender specifications and financial structure evolved significantly for this new contract over its predecessor. The current contract was tendered in 2007/8 and the unit prices have not been revised since then. Therefore some increases were anticipated but in fact, the financial offer of PPS, similar to the financial offer of the other tenderers, remains competitive and it has been judged among the offers presented by tenderers as the best "value for money" offer by the evaluation committee appointed by the contracting authority.

I hope that this clarification provides you with reassurance that we not only take the security of our staff extremely seriously, but also apply the highest standards to the performance of our contractors and the integrity of our internal process.

Yours sincerely,



Catherine Ashton