The EU is permanently represented in Afghanistan through its EU Special Representative (EUSR), who also serves as the head of the EU delegation in Kabul – a post held since April 2010 by Vygaudas Ušackas of Lithuania.

The EUSR is mandated to support the development of Afghan institutions and maintain close contact with the government, the parliament and other relevant local Afghan authorities as well as other international stakeholders including the Senior Civilian Representative of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN – the latter with a particular emphasis on contributing to better coordinated international assistance.

He also monitors and advises on progress on a broad set of issues, including security sector reform, civilian capacity building, humanitarian rights, good governance and the establishment of institutions of the rule of law, in particular an independent judiciary and electoral reform. The EUSR further provides political guidance to the head of the EU Policing Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL), on efforts aiming to counter organized crime and trafficking as well as on anti-corruptions measures and border control issues.

While the mission is well placed to contribute to a non-military transition, the overwhelming political imperative to hand over military operations to Afghan forces has limited UNAMA’s involvement to an observer role.

Nevertheless, UNAMA promotes dialogue between development partners and ISAF to ensure that development issues are part of transition planning and design, and advocates for joint decision-making between ISAF and ANSF. UNAMA also plays a role in assuring the Afghan population that the transition process does not mean that the international community will abandon Afghanistan and that there will be continuing support for the country’s development. As part of this effort, UNAMA has taken steps to enhance coherence and coordination among provincial development councils, the UN Country Team and donors to assure a sustainable transition process.

Still, UNAMA’s circumscribed role somewhat curtails its ability to support a comprehensive transfer of authority to the Afghan government and limits the mission's ability to address lingering concerns among Afghans about the international community’s commitment to Afghanistan.

ELECTORAL POLITICS, 2010-2011

In September 2010, UNAMA, along with UNDP, helped coordinate international support for the parliamentary elections. Coming one year after the controversial August 2009 presidential election – which set in motion a bitter public dispute between former UNAMA officials – the parliamentary election again plunged the mission into turbulent Afghan electoral politics. Following an investigation into widespread allegations of corruption and fraud, the Independent Elections Commission and Election Complaints Commission certified the results on 24 November after invalidating nearly 25 percent of the ballots for irregularities.

In January 2011, Karzai announced his plans to delay inauguration of the parliament to allow for more time for investigation of the results, and established a controversial special court for this task. Following the announcement, UNAMA, backed by the EU, the US and Canada released a strong press statement expressing “deep concern and surprise” at the planned delay and urged the government for a timely inauguration of the parliament. A few days later, a reportedly reluctant President Karzai swore in the parliament, but not without criticizing the international community’s involvement in the election.

In June, the special court called for the replacement of 62 members of the lower house on charges of fraud – a ruling that Afghan officials and international observers have criticized as unconstitutional and illegal. The parliamentarians have repeatedly called for the UN to intervene, while President Karzai says the disagreement is an internal Afghan affair. SRSG de Mistura has called on the parties to resolve the dispute in accordance with the Afghan Constitution, but has restrained from further public involvement in the issue.

The standoff between the parliament and the president illustrates some of the difficulties inherent to UNAMA’s mandate. After years of cultivating