

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT



WORKSHOP

**Afghanistan:
Challenges
and
perspectives
until 2020**

AFET, DEVE



WORKSHOP

Afghanistan: Challenges and perspectives until 2020

This paper was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan.

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Authors:

Richard GHIASY, Researcher, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Sweden;
Mona KANWAL SHEIKH, Senior Researcher, Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark (briefing 1);
Arne STRAND, Director of the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway (briefing 2);
Giulia BONACQUISTI, Project Officer, Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), Belgium, and
Victor TANZARELLA HARTMANN, Project Assistant, Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), Belgium (workshop report);

Official Responsible: Fernando GARCÉS DE LOS FAYOS

Editorial Assistant: Györgyi MÁCSAI

Feedback of all kind is welcome. Please write to: fernando.garces@europarl.europa.eu.

To obtain copies, please send a request to: poldep-expo@europarl.europa.eu

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WORKSHOP

POLICY DEPARTMENT, DG EXPO
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS (AFET),
COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT (DEVE) AND
FOR THE DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH
AFGHANISTAN



Thursday 17.11.2016 – **09:00-11:30**
ALTIERO SPINELLI BUILDING – ROOM **A3G3**

CONTACT AND REGISTRATION: poldep-expo@ep.europa.eu

Afghanistan

Challenges and perspectives until 2020

Chairman: Petras AUŠTREVICIUS

Table of contents

1	Workshop report	9
1.1	Introductory remarks	9
1.2	Panel on the political situation and prospects of Afghanistan	9
1.3	Panel on the security situation and prospects of Afghanistan	13
1.4	Panel on the socio-economic development and prospects of Afghanistan	15
2	Political challenges and perspectives 2016-2019 by Rhichard Ghiasy	19
2.1	Executive summary	19
2.2	The political situation in Afghanistan	19
2.3	The prospective political situation in 2017-2019	21
2.4	Implications for EU-Afghanistan relations	23
3	Afghanistan's security situation anno 2016: an overview, by Dr Mona Kanwal Sheikh	25
3.1	Executive summary	25
3.2	2015-16: What has happened during the last years?	26
3.3	Challenges identified in the Afghan security sector	28
3.4	How does the future look? Initiatives and prospects	29
3.5	Recommendations	30
4	An Afghan path to peace and development, by Dr Arne Strand	32
4.1	Executive Summary	32
4.2	Contextual framework and challenges	33
4.3	The Afghan National Peace and Development Framework (2017-21)	34
4.4	The European Commission's Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020	37
4.5	Afghan National Priority Programmes and the SMAF	39
4.6	Conclusions and recommendations	41
	Bibliography	46

For the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan

WORKSHOP: AFGHANISTAN - CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES UNTIL 2020

Thursday, 17 November 2016, 9:00- 11:30

Interpretation: DE, EN, ES, FR, IT,

Brussels **Altiero Spinelli** Building, room **ASP A3G3**

PROGRAMME

- 9:00-9:15 **Introductory remarks**
Welcome by the Chair of the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan,
MEP **Petras AUŠTREVČIUS**
Short address by Mr **Ahmad Seyar MAALJI**, Chargé d'affaires of the Embassy and Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Brussels
- 9:15-9:55 **Panel on the political situation** and prospects of Afghanistan,
moderated by MEP **Petras AUŠTREVČIUS**
- Presentation of Mr **Richard GHIASY**, Researcher and project manager at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).
 - Presentation by Ms **Paola PAMPALONI**, Head of Division for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives, European External Action Service
- Debate*
- 9:55-10:35 **Panel on the security situation** and prospects of Afghanistan,
moderated by MEP **Petras AUŠTREVČIUS**
- Presentation by Ms **Mona Kanwal SHEIKH**, senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS).
 - Presentation by Mr **Marc FRANCIS**, Operations policy officer for Afghanistan, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
- Debate*
- 10:35-11:15 **Panel on the socio-economic development** and prospects of Afghanistan,
moderated by MEP **Nirj DEVA**
- Presentation by Mr **Arne STRAND**, Director of the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre at the Chr. Michelsen Institute, and coordinator at the Norwegian Centre for Humanitarian Studies
 - Presentation by Mr **Pierre AMILHAT**, Director for Development Coordination - Asia, Central Asia, Middle East/Gulf and Pacific, European Commission, DG DEVCO
- Debate*
- 11:00-11:15 **Concluding remarks by the Chair of the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan,**
MEP **Petras AUŠTREVČIUS**

For the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Committee on Development (DEVE) and
the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan

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BIOGRAPHIES

Richard GHIASY

Richard Ghiasy, a Dutch national with Afghan roots, is a researcher and project manager with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) armed conflict and conflict management programme. Richard is a former non-resident analyst at the Afghan Embassy in Beijing. More recently he was a research fellow at the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) in Kabul. Thematically his research interests lie foremost at the interface of security and development, geographically he focuses on China (foreign policy/development), Afghanistan (overall/relations with great powers), and Central Asia. He has lived in China for extended periods, has studied and worked in seven countries, and has carried out professional travel to more than twenty-five countries. He holds an MBA from Wuhan University of Technology, and an MPA in development studies from Tsinghua University.

Mona Kanwal SHEIKH

Mona Kanwal Sheikh is a senior researcher affiliated to the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). Sheikh's main area of expertise is militant movements, especially the movements related to the Pakistani Taliban. Her research focuses on religious justifications of, and mobilization to, violence. She has also worked more broadly with Islamist ideologies related to Al-Qaeda, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. She is the author of the chapter *The emergence of Islamic State in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (2016) in forthcoming book of the DIIS on the relationship between Al Qaeda and Islamic State in different regions. Sheikh has published in leading IR journals on the concepts of religion, violence, secularism and evil in IR. She also co-authored the DIIS Research Report *Taliban talks: past present and prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan* (2013) and wrote comments and working papers on Afghanistan. Mona is an experienced debater and frequently gives lectures on issues related to Danish integration, foreign politics, European Islam, religion and secularism and radical Islamism. During her many years' work in different NGOs, Sheikh has organized a significant number of dialogue conferences, information campaigns and activities. Before she joined the DIIS, she was the Visiting Scholar at University of California Berkeley and University of California Santa Barbara. More information available here: <http://www.diis.dk/en/experts/mona-kanwal-sheikh>.

Arne STRAND

Arne Strand is currently Director of the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre at the Chr. Michelsen Institute. He is also coordinator at the Norwegian Centre for Humanitarian Studies. Strand holds PhD in Post-war Recovery Studies (qualified esp. in coordination of humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies). His research focuses on aid coordination, forced migration and reintegration, peace-building and security sector reform and humanitarian and development assistance. Strand has been team leader of several evaluations and research programmes in and on Afghanistan. He has extensive management experience from NGOs and research institutes, and has also been involved in developing management and professional capacities of Afghan NGOs and peacebuilding organisations. He was for instance a member of research programme *Achieving Durable Peace in Afghanistan*, funded by Norwegian MFA (2011). In 2008 he participated in *Multi sector study: Understanding Afghanistan* as a member of the team, commissioned by UK Department for International Development. In 2001 he was part of the UN Inter-Agency Evaluation on Needs Assessment and Identification of Vulnerable Population, Case Afghanistan, commissioned by OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF & WFP. His publications on Afghanistan include: *Perspectives of Local Violence: Revenge, Mediation and Conflict Resolution* (2013), *Afghanistan: Political and cultural complexity* (2011), or *Fighting for Peace? Former Combatants and the Afghan Peace Process* (2008). More information available at: <http://www.cmi.no/staff/cv/arne-strand.pdf> and <http://www.cmi.no/staff/arne-strand>.

Abbreviations

AFET	European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs
ANPDF	Afghan National Peace and Development Fund
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ARTF	Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund
BPHS	Basic Packages of Health Service
CAPD	Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development
CC	Citizens' Charter
CDC	Community Development Council
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DEVE	European Parliament's Committee on Development
EEAS	European External Action Service
EP	European Parliament
EPHS	Essential Packages of Hospital Services
EU	European Union
EUPOL	European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOA	Government of Afghanistan
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IS	Islamic State
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISK	Islamic State Khorasan
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MIP	Multi-Annual Indicative Programme
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPPs	National Priority Programmes
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NUG	National Unity Government
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PTS	Program Takhim-E-Sohl
RSM	Resolute Support Mission
SMAF	Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America

1 Workshop report

1.1 Introductory remarks

This report summarises the proceedings of a workshop jointly organised by the European Parliament's Committees on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Development (DEVE) together with the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Afghanistan. The workshop, which took place on 17 November 2016, was chaired by Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Petras Auštrevičius (ALDE, Lithuania), Chair of the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan and member of the AFET Committee.

The main aim of this workshop was to build greater awareness in the European Parliament (EP) on current developments in Afghanistan, most notably in the aftermath of the Brussels conference on Afghanistan which took place on 4-5 October 2016¹. For this reason, experts were invited to provide first-hand information to enable a well-informed debate on the situation in the country. The workshop was structured around three panels focusing respectively on 1) the political situation; 2) the security situation; and 3) socio-economic development.

1.2 Panel on the political situation and prospects of Afghanistan

MEP Petras Auštrevičius reminded that the Brussels conference brought together 75 countries and 26 international organisations and agencies. These participants issued a *communiqué*² renewing the Partnership for Prosperity and Peace between the National Unity Government (NUG) of Afghanistan and the international community. They endorsed the ambitious reform agenda of the Afghanistan government, and committed to ensuring continued international political and financial support for Afghanistan over the next four years. The total sum committed by the international community for Afghanistan at the Brussels conference amounts to approximately EUR 13.6 billion, one third of which is committed by the European Union (EU) and its Member States (around EUR 5 billion).

Further efforts are required on Afghanistan's way to a functional, accountable and sustainable state. In order to foster this progress, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the following three pillars over the next decade: 1) institution building, as outlined by the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2016) and the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF) (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2015c); 2) sustained international support and funding near current level through 2020, with increased aid effectiveness; and 3) regional and international support for economic development, regional economic cooperation and a political process towards a lasting peace and reconciliation. Overall, argued Mr Auštrevičius, the conference can be considered a success, as it sent a strong signal of hope, confidence and commitment to the country.

1.2.1 Presentation by Richard Ghiasy, Researcher and Project Manager at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

In Afghanistan, foreign invasion and interference on the one hand, and inter-elite competition over power, resources, identity and ideology on the other hand have been two principal drivers of an almost four-decade old hybrid conflict. These dynamics largely continue to date, and Afghanistan is in an ongoing political crisis. Roughly two years after the NUG's establishment, some major challenges persist, namely a lack of political and electoral reform implementation, the fragmentation of the NUG, corruption and a lack of economic development. In addition, President Ashraf Ghani's policy of seeking closer ties with Pakistan

¹ Further information on the main outcomes of the conference can be found at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2016/10/05/> (last accessed on 8 December 2016).

² The *communiqué* is available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2016/10/Joint-communicue_pdf (last accessed on 8 December 2016).

has largely failed so far, and armed opposition groups – most notably the Taliban – have limited inclination to either surrender or more proactively pursue reconciliation through a peace process.

The postponement of political and electoral reforms deprives the NUG of its authority and legitimacy among the Afghan people. The people's confidence in the NUG is declining as a result of the current poor prospects of employment and limited human security (among other things). Furthermore, there is evidence of trends of growing ethnic polarisation, foremost demonstrated in social media.

Quite a unique momentum can be currently observed in the foreign dynamics – that is, a great power and a regional power (United States, EU, China, India, Russia and to some extent Iran) convergence of interest to see stability in Afghanistan. However, the India-Pakistani rivalry continues to erode the stability of South Asia and proxy activities continue at the detriment of Afghanistan.

Looking forward, the likelihood of Ghani's re-election in 2019 is rather slim and only feasible if the NUG achieves demonstrable success for the Afghan people in 2017-2018. The NUG will probably avoid full-scale collapse but continue to prove rather ineffective in providing public goods, developing the economy or achieving an agreement with the armed opposition. The deadlock between Afghan security forces and the Taliban will continue to hamper investment, large regional economic integration initiatives and the growth of the licit private sector, and to absorb the attention and the resources of the NUG. In this scenario, the implications for the social contract are likely to result in increased popular discontent – largely articulated through the ballot box in 2019. In the absence of sustainable licit employment, civil society engagement in the illicit economy will continue, and the lure of radical violent Islam will remain strong. Migration tendencies will also largely remain.

The current international convergence of interest to see stability in Afghanistan will likely remain in place. However, the United States' foreign policy towards Afghanistan might be affected by the policies of the upcoming Trump administration, which might choose to adopt a tougher stance on the NUG, and this could work out rather effective.

The policy of Pakistan vis-à-vis Afghanistan and a certain support to the armed opposition are quite unlikely to change; however, there is a slim chance that economic integration initiatives (such as the Belt and Road Initiative, specifically the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), as well as concerns towards the ensuing security situation in Balochistan will somewhat impact Islamabad's current policies to Afghanistan. Daesh's defeat in Syria and Iraq will probably drive this group to the East, and Afghanistan is a very likely destination.

The EU has no other choice but to continue to support Afghanistan politically and financially over the next few years. Despite a certain 'fatigue' in the international community, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind that the alternative will very likely result in a collapse of the NUG, a military defeat at the hands of the armed opposition, most notably the Taliban, military fractionalisation and possibly a relapsing of civil war to some degree.

Mr Ghiasy called on the EU to look at the big picture in the region: unless the India-Pakistani rivalry is soothed, it is unlikely that Pakistan will disengage from its interference in Afghan affairs. For this reason, the EU should consider pursuing an avenue where extra-regional and regional stakeholders (EU, United States, China and Russia) engage through relevant international platforms to address some of the fundamental disputes between India and Pakistan, and possibly between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Furthermore, he recommended setting tighter quantitative indicators for NUG's accountability. Unless the NUG's cohesion and effectiveness improve, unless the peace process starts bringing more concrete results, unless employment is created, Afghanistan will continue to be a global risk and to require continued global attention.

1.2.2 Presentation by Paola Pampaloni, Head of Division for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives, European External Action Service (EEAS)

Following the Brussels Conference, one EU priority remains the peace process. In this regard, engagement with the insurgency is becoming a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of the country, as there can be no development without security. An important development was achieved in September 2016, with an agreement concluded between the Afghan government and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin party. This deal could serve as an example for other insurgency groups – namely the Taliban – to come to the negotiating table. During a dinner chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini ahead of the Brussels Ministerial Conference, the main stakeholders and regional players highlighted a regional support for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, inclusive and democracy-based peace process.

Another priority is regional cooperation, namely interconnectivity within the region not only in terms of transport, trade and economic cooperation, but also in terms of people-to-people contacts and border activities. The EU is also working with Afghanistan on migration, in a bilateral context but also with regard to the regional dimension, specifically on the issue of Afghan refugees currently hosted in Pakistan and Iran (several millions of people who left Afghanistan during the war and are now returning). The EU and Afghanistan have recently signed the *Joint Way Forward on migration issues* (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan & the European Union, 2016) (hereinafter *Joint Way Forward*), a bilateral political document providing a comprehensive framework on the issues of mutual concern. The document aims to facilitate the return process to Afghanistan for those whose asylum request has been rejected in Europe.

With regard to the regional dimension, around 1 million refugees are currently in the process of returning to Afghanistan. If this return is not orderly discussed and managed with the neighbouring countries (mainly Iran and Pakistan) and proper reintegration is not ensured, these returnees will not have a place to go and some of the youth may be attracted to join insurgency groups rather than find economic opportunities. To this end, the EU is trying to have a dialogue with the relevant actors and work on finding a sustainable solution on the issue of Afghan refugees in its regional dimension.

The EU will also engage in the support of civilian policing. After the termination of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) at the end of 2016, it will maintain EU's presence (through a team of policy advisors) in order to ensure the continuation of the institution-building process of the Minister of the Interior and the police forces in the years to come.

Other EU priorities include: following the political evolutions within the country and dialogue with the relevant stakeholders, electoral reforms, human rights dialogue, the fight against corruption and the fight against drug production and trafficking. On the topic of electoral reforms, a number of experts in the EU delegation in Kabul are working with the local key players to ensure the proper implementation of the election law decree entered into force in September 2016. In addition, the EU is fully committed to continue working on the electoral monitoring of the upcoming parliamentary elections and the following presidential elections. The EU is also encouraging Afghanistan in its fight against corruption. The establishment of the Anti-corruption Justice Centre provides a very clear signal to politicians and citizens that there is no tolerance on corruption in the country. The European Union is also monitoring the problem of drug trafficking and production, which have been unfortunately increasing in the past few years.

In terms of EU-Afghanistan relations, Ms Pampaloni welcomed the finalisation of the EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development (CAPD). This first legal framework between the EU and Afghanistan is likely to be signed in 2017. It has been agreed to start provisionally the implementation in a number of areas (e.g. women's rights, human rights, regional cooperation) pending the ratification of the Agreement by the EU Member States' Parliaments, the European Parliament and the Afghan Parliament.

1.2.3 Address by Gharanai Khwakhuzhi, First Secretary, Political and EU Affairs, Embassy and Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Brussels

The EUPOL mission has been very important for the development of the Afghan police sector (in terms of capability development, gender equality, etc.) and enforcement of the rule of law, and the continued presence of an advisory body after 2016 is to be welcomed.

The recent conferences that were held in Warsaw and Brussels were seen very positively in Afghanistan both by the people and the government, as they sent a clear message from the international community that Afghanistan will not be left alone after 2016.

Regarding the reform of the justice sector, the Afghan government has been very committed to the fight against corruption, as testified by recent cases involving high-level officials.

As regards the security situation in the country, the government is facing severe challenges from the insurgents. However, the fact that the insurgents are intensifying their attacks on the Afghan forces shows their willingness to come to the negotiation table in a stronger position, and to put pressure on the government to accept some of their demands; thus portraying that while the insurgents are fighting against the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) they are also relying on the Peace Negotiations Process.

More generally, the continued commitment of the international community with the ANDSF has had the positive effect of making the people of Afghanistan more satisfied with the ANDSF's reliability.

1.2.4 Q&A

MEP Linda McAvan (S&D, United Kingdom), Chair of the DEVE committee, called for a greater information flow towards the European Parliament, especially ahead of the signature of important documents such as the *Joint Way Forward*. Secondly, she asked for further clarification about the numbers of migrants expected to return from Iran and Pakistan and the kind of support needed by Afghanistan.

MEP Barbara Lochbihler (Greens/EFA, Germany) underlined that the *Joint Way Forward* is a political declaration without any binding effect. However, the content of this document specifically sets out the framework for a readmission agreement. She pointed out the danger of aiming to send Afghans back to their country in the light of the deteriorating security situation there.

MEP Petras Auštrevičius (ALDE, Lithuania) observed that 1 million migrants may potentially return to Afghanistan this or next year, which is a very significant flow for a country like Afghanistan. He thus wondered to what extent the EU's development policy has instruments to support Afghanistan to accommodate and reintegrate these returning refugees.

Gharanai Khwakhuzhi (Afghan Embassy in Brussels) clarified that 1 million people are expected to return to Afghanistan by the end of the Afghan year (March 2017), mainly from Pakistan and Iran. Regarding the *Joint Way Forward*, migrants will have to go through the legal procedures of the Member States in order to be returned to Afghanistan. He reminded the existence of bilateral negotiations (either ongoing or finalised) with some EU Member States (e.g. Germany, Sweden, Finland) on the return procedures.

Paola Pampaloni (EEAS) confirmed that the *Joint Way Forward* is not a legally binding agreement but a political declaration. Further to this, the EU is trying to have a dialogue with the broader region (mainly Iran and Pakistan) to deal with the Afghan refugees. When these people return to a country with a volatile security situation, they need protection and economic reintegration. It is therefore on top of the EU's political agenda to find possible ways to handle this situation from a humanitarian point of view in the short term, and with development funds in the medium and long term. To the argument that the *Joint Way Forward* document is designed to send refugees back in a volatile security situation, Pampaloni responded

that this document provides for the return of illegal migrants whose asylum request has been rejected and not of refugees. It is the EU Member States which have the competence, on the basis of national legislations, to decide whether the asylum request is accepted or not. Furthermore, the criteria for the examination of the asylum requests do take into consideration the security situation of the place of return, and the principle of *non-refoulement* is fully guaranteed by all Member States and the EU. The *Joint Way Forward* is not a readmission agreement. Yet, one of the articles of the future CAPD with Afghanistan foresees the possibility to start negotiations for a readmission agreement. This will depend on the political will of the EU Member States (and also Afghanistan), as such agreement would prevail on existing bilateral arrangements. In terms of financial assistance, there will be a package to help the development and reintegration of returnees through job creation and increasing economic opportunities.

Arne Strand (Chr. Michelsen Institute) pointed out that, looking at previous returns, it can be expected that most of these people will end up in large cities, putting a huge pressure on urban living conditions. This adds up to the issue of 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country. Finally, Dr Strand expressed his concern that incentives potentially offered to the returnees will not allow them to secure income and long-term livelihoods because of the economic situation in the country.

1.3 Panel on the security situation and prospects of Afghanistan

1.3.1 Presentation by Dr Mona Kanwal Sheikh, Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)

The Taliban movement has been resurging in spite of the efforts at weakening and fragmentising the movement, in particular from United States (US) forces. The Taliban are now stronger than they have ever been since 2001 and control, according to several reports, between 10 and 20 % of Afghanistan. The closer collaboration among Taliban affiliated groups but also with the Haqqani network has resulted in an increase in civilian casualties, although other movements and militias, as well as governmental military operations, are also involved in this increase (according to Human Rights Watch). The Pakistani military operations in the tribal areas of North-Waziristan have pushed some Pakistani Taliban across the border to Afghanistan and have encouraged cooperation between Pakistani Taliban and the so-called Islamic State in the Khorasan (ISK). This branch of IS announced its presence in the region in 2015, yet comprises only 1 500 to 3 000 fighters (with collaborators from Islamic movements, e.g. from Uzbekistan). ISK is at war with the Afghan Taliban, while collaborating with the Pakistani Taliban. The peace deal with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar shows signs of progress, but the Afghan Taliban seem unaffected by the peace deal (they are old enemies of Hekmatyar) and violence even intensified.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was disbanded in 2014, and transitioned into a training and advice mission for the Afghan security forces (the Resolute Support Mission – RSM). US President Barack Obama has recently stated that US forces would still need to carry out combat operations, due to the IS and Taliban resurgence. The US forces are now mainly targeting militant movements linked to Al-Qaeda and IS, yet the unexpectedly high number of Al-Qaeda militants has surprised US intelligence services.

The Afghan security forces lack certain capabilities and equipment, as well as logistical competences. The security sector still has a high rate of desertions and ghost soldiers (who are formally enrolled but not in actual service), in particular in the Helmand province. Both the Afghan local police (which consists of pro-government militias) and the national police force suffer from identity and competency issues. Human Rights Watch reports show that the recruitment of children by local police forces remains a very important problem, and this will constitute a continued dilemma for the West in its support of these forces. Levels of corruption remain high within the defence and security sector (one of the highest rate in the world), and

tensions remain between the two old rivals within the NUG. Other problems include electoral reform, narcotrafficking, the lack of women's empowerment and economic opportunities for youngsters.

With regard to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) operations, one question is how the RSM can work within these institutional deficiencies. Problems could also arise due to a lack of collaboration on the ground between individual States' operations, the EU and NATO, and between military counterterrorism operations and the RSM.

1.3.2 Intervention by Marc Francis, Afghanistan Operations Policy Officer, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

The RSM has been in place for two years, taking over from ISAF which ended in December 2014. At this point in time, RSM is NATO's most significant operational deployment. It is a non-combat mission that offers training, advice and assistance to the Afghan Security Forces. As a result of this transition and the end of ISAF, Afghan Security Forces have been in sole charge of the country's security for the past two years and have managed this process without combat support from the international military troops. This in itself is an achievement that should not be overlooked. Of course, the security situation in Afghanistan is fragile and there are reports of regular Taliban aggressions. However, if the Taliban are able to mount isolated attacks in the provinces, which create headlines, they have not been able to claim any strategic gains over 2015 and 2016. And while this may look like a phase of strategic stalemate, the ability of the Afghan Forces to handle their own security shows their steadfast determination to keep taking on the responsibility for Afghan security, even in the face of the losses they have suffered. The Afghan Security Forces are in control of approximately 70 % of the populated areas, while the Taliban are in control of 10 % of these areas, and the remaining 20 % are the areas in which control is contested. NATO is confident that the Afghan Security Forces will be able to continue to discharge their security responsibilities, and that they are sustainable in light of the commitments made by the international community to support them.

A key issue in maintaining a coherent approach to combatting the insurgency is to ensure that there is resilience at the top level of the government. NATO's Secretary General has been in constant contact with President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah, who have clearly stated that they are fully committed to work together to this end. In addition to the Taliban insurgency, there are some pockets of so-called Daesh fighters but these appear to be facing stiff opposition from both the government forces and the Taliban themselves and have not made any gains.

On the topic of the reconciliation efforts that are being led by the Afghan government, there is good news. The recent breakthrough in securing a reconciliation deal with Hezb-e Islami is an important step which opens the way for future talks with other insurgents. This move has shown that the process of reconciliation is being taken seriously and that agreements can be reached.

In terms of concrete decisions, two important measures were agreed at this year's NATO summit in Warsaw: 1) the sustainment of the RSM through a flexible regional model beyond 2016 to continue to offer training, advice and assistance to the Afghan Security Forces and 2) the agreement to continue national contributions to the financial sustainment of the Afghan Security Forces, including to the end of 2020. Beyond these two measures, NATO is also working on the partnership process with Afghanistan, which will be further developed over the coming year. Coupled with the decisions taken at the EU's Brussels conference on development support, the Warsaw Summit decisions show that the international community as a whole continues to support the Afghan NUG. NATO will also continue to support the efforts undertaken by the NUG in their bid to reach the Afghan-led process of reconciliation and put an end to the insurgency.

1.3.3 Q&A

MEP Georgios Epitideios (NI, Greece) asked whether there was any pragmatic expectation to see new developments, in particular the opportunity for illegal Afghans migrants in Europe to return.

Marc Francis (NATO) reaffirmed that the security situation and the balance of power between the government and the insurgencies will set the conditions for returns. One concern is the incentives to join the national army or the insurgency. If the power balance is shifting one way or the other, it will change the local population's view of who is the best candidate to back in order to stabilise the situation.

MEP Nirj Deva (ECR, United Kingdom) asked confirmation that Pakistan will expel or resettle three million Afghan refugees into Afghanistan in the next few months, and asked how this war-torn country would absorb those returns, and who those expelled refugees are.

Paola Pampaloni (EEAS) answered that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration estimate the number of imminent returns to half a million. (The Afghan Presidency has talked of one million returns, yet probably taking into account year 2017). She pointed out that Afghanistan will be unable to absorb those returns without the support of international humanitarian organisations and donors and without a dialogue with regional partners. Ms Pampaloni assured that the EU is trying to have a dialogue with relevant players in the region and to facilitate the dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as with Iran. She reaffirmed that Pakistani authorities are open to discussion: this issue was addressed during recent EU-Pakistan meetings. Efforts to ensure proper reintegration are necessary to make sure that returnees are not attracted to insurgent movements.

MEP Nirj Deva remarked that the word 'return' sounds neutral. He stressed that refugees do not want to go back but are being compelled to. He suggested that this is equivalent to what happened during the Second World War, as people are being forced to move without their consent.

Paola Pampaloni recalled the distinction between voluntary returns and forced returns. She agreed that returns can be provoked by the political situation, problems of harassment and uncertainty. She pointed out the sensitivity of this issue and assured that the EEAS is looking at all aspects: voluntary and non-voluntary returns, both from a humanitarian and development perspective.

1.4 Panel on the socio-economic development and prospects of Afghanistan

MEP Nirj Deva (ECR, United Kingdom), who chaired the third panel of the workshop, pointed out that the current conflict in Afghanistan is serving no one and reminded that Afghanistan is the 171st least prosperous country in the world. However, it is also a narco-State, with USD 200 billion in revenue from narcotics per year, that is, USD 6 000 per Afghani. Mr Deva remarked that this would technically make Afghanistan's income per capita comparable to that of a middle-income country in Asia, like Malaysia. Yet, he regretted, this revenue obviously does not contribute to the development of the country.

Mr Deva acknowledged that, over the last 15 years, the support provided by the international community, with the EU as the largest donor, has made a difference: it has increased the support for the health and educational sectors, created governance frameworks, and set in motion the foundations for nation-building. Yet Mr Deva raised the question of whether, at a time when global shifts in power, wealth and income are occurring, Europe should continue leading these efforts. He expressed concern over the Commission's support programme, worrying that part of the funding provided is being stolen. He posed the question of how to secure those funds and ensure they arrive to their purpose.

1.4.1 Presentation by Dr Arne Strand, Director of the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre at the Chr. Michelsen Institute

60 % of the Afghan population is under 26 years and 400 000 youths come into the labour market each year. This youth can be both a challenge and a hope for Afghanistan, as they are the most inclined to be part of the development of the country.

In light of the military situation and the fragmentation of the insurgency, even a peace agreement will not end all local conflicts in Afghanistan. Donors have to be prepared to provide development aid even after a peace deal. A major advancement achieved at the Brussels conference was the issuance of the Afghan Peace and Development Framework, which covers 1) governance and state effectiveness; 2) social capital and nation-building; 3) economic growth and job creation; and 4) poverty reduction and inclusion.

The EU plan addresses some of the key areas. Agriculture and rural development, which can sustain the livelihood of the majority of the population, are crucial: recently 70 % of the population still relied on rural income. Irrigation is the key issue to secure the development of agriculture, and tapping out from water resources shared by or flowing into neighbouring countries will require diplomatic efforts. Health and education are not sufficiently prioritised in the Afghan plan. With women's empowerment, these are the key issues where major progress has been made, particularly in light of the major reduction in child and maternal mortality. Policing and the rule of law are extremely challenging issues. Police forces do not enjoy sufficient levels of trust among the population. Bringing more women into the police and continue combating harassment could result in positive developments. Women's economic empowerment is also extremely important. Some policies might work very well in some parts of the country but will require longer time horizons in others. Urban development is also a major challenge since urban areas are the most affected by refugee returns and internal displacement. In terms of infrastructure, a proper follow-up with the Afghans on infrastructure maintenance will need to be ensured. Infrastructure can be an important source of local employment, if maintenance is taken into account.

With regard to democratisation and accountability, the Parliament is currently challenging the President, perhaps to negotiate a role before the next elections. This is a power struggle that is inherent to how the political system in Afghanistan was constructed, and would warrant a more detailed scrutiny of the adequacy of the political system, rather than just new elections. The implementation of the Citizens' Charter (the new National Priority Programme) could raise both issues of coordination (on how to get Afghan ministries to work in tandem) and excessive complexity. It will require real political efforts.

As a conclusion, all these contextual constraints should be acknowledged and development should be flexible, with monitoring and evaluation allowing for adaptable expectations. Overly ambitious objectives and strict timelines can be an enemy of development. Peace agreements will lay the foundation for development, and electoral reform should be supported. As for rural development, district administration and civil society should be supported as much as possible, through community-based programmes. Europe should make good use of aid diplomacy and always engage with the Afghans.

1.4.2 Presentation by Pierre Amilhat, Director for Development, Coordination – Asia, Central Asia, Middle East/Gulf and Pacific, DG DEVCO, European Commission

2016 has been an important year for Afghanistan. The Brussels conference was a long journey, with many challenges that disturbed the course of its organisation: uncertainties about the participation of non-traditional donors, a disunited NUG, not to mention the security situation and the migration crisis on the border with Pakistan.

Has assistance been effective? Since 2001, the GDP per capita has increased fivefold, and revenue mobilisation has gone up by 10 %. The collection of taxes has gone up by 20 % in the last two years, also as a result of anti-corruption measures against tax avoidance. Life expectancy rose by 20 years, school enrolment increased from less than one million to eight millions. Maternal mortality is at 324 per 100 000 births, down from 1 600 in 2001. Women's representation in public office is at a historic high.

Yet the withdrawal of ISAF in 2014 has had severe effects on the development of the country. Economic growth has fallen to less than 1 % in 2016, only picking up now thanks to public finance management reforms and expenditure control, as well as continued external support. Important development gains have been put at risk during this transition, with increasing unemployment and levels of poverty, heightened security risk and violence, an erosion of public services provision and strong migration pressures. A legacy of weak institutions still undermines the delivery of social services, and deters private sector investment, with limited access to physical capital. Achieving higher growth will require more efforts by the Afghan government and the international community but also more cooperation with regional neighbours, especially for exporting industries. The recent Brussels conference has, beyond the financial pledges, confirmed the broad international community's support, which remains an essential condition for growth.

The Afghan government faces a budgetary challenge: 45 % of the national budget is used for security purposes, the rest is spent on obligatory expenditure (salaries, recurring costs, etc.), which leaves an extremely small margin for action. That is why the Afghan government and the World Bank have been advocating for granting Afghanistan a larger margin of manoeuvre in implementing their policies. While there must be a follow-up on development projects, the Afghans must be in charge of their own development and the government needs to build its own capacity. The resistance from some donors to channel aid on budget comes from the fear of corruption: aid going on the government's budget is considered more risky than traditional project financing. Yet experience shows that there tends to be more corruption with traditional projects and programmes and in particular with the tendering and procurement processes that accompany these actions than with on-budget operations. The latter are based on incentivised/targeted policy dialogue and flanked by robust measures of oversight, transparency, capacity and institution building. Finally, underperformance or mismanagement or unacceptable change in political behaviour can result in funding being totally or partly suspended. In fact, most of assistance to Afghanistan goes on budget through trust funds set up by the World Bank or the UN system. That being said, it is civil society organisations (CSOs) that can exercise the social control necessary to verify the good provision of public services. CSOs were present at the Brussels conference and the European Commission increasingly works with them throughout the region to monitor government spending.

As a conclusion, while there has been a lot of criticism on the NUG, it should be remembered that it has been in power for only two years. A step back should be taken to assess what has been achieved in those two years. The SMAF is the contract between the NUG and international donors, aimed at achieving policy reforms and implementing the national development plan in constant dialogue with and vigilant support from the community of donors.

1.4.3 Q&A

Before opening the discussion to the floor, MEP Nirj Deva (ECR, United Kingdom) asked why Afghan crops used for the production of heroin are not instead used for the production of morphine, for which there is a large demand in developing countries. Mr Deva also stressed the importance of the private sector in the country's future development, particularly the Afghan private sector. In his view, a conference gathering the Afghan private sector should be envisaged.

Diana Khatib (As-Istishari Al-Strategy Center, Abu Dhabi) pointed out that foreign agencies often provide no alternative after destroying poppy crops, which results in a lack of trust on the part of local populations.

Arne Strand (Chr. Michelsen Institute) confirmed, but said the destruction of crops is also highly political and can result from internal territorial disputes. The war has perhaps become more of a war over resources than an ideological war. Besides, the Taliban and government staff equally earn from poppy cultivation, and in most cases its first beneficiaries are poor farmers and seasonal labours, which constitutes a real dilemma. In any case, the Colombian peace deal could serve as an example in this respect.

Gharanai Khwakhuzhi (Afghan Embassy in Brussels) answered that the Afghan government does have an 'Alternative Livelihood' policy for farmers who lose their crops of opium. Saffron in particular is very popular in the region and the world, and almost as profitable as poppy cultivation. Saffron cultivation has notably been promoted in the south of the country, and Afghan saffron has been granted the highest international quality grade for the last three years.

MEP Afzal Khan (S&D, United Kingdom) raised the question of whether the USA and Russia really seek stability in Afghanistan or follow their own geopolitical agenda. He also pointed out the importance of water management, which is also an issue in Indian-Pakistani relations.

Arne Strand agreed that water is a source of tension in the whole region: had there been a settlement in Afghanistan, it could have had a positive influence on India-Pakistan relations. As the West withdraws, regional cooperation and integration could be crucial.

Pierre Amilhat reminded that the USA is providing the lion share of security expenditure. It has reduced its contribution to economic development (roughly from USD 2 to 1 billion), but could revise it upwards. Mr Amilhat assured that, in any case, an American withdrawal would be catastrophic. As to development issues, Mr Amilhat explained that one challenge for the Brussels conference was to gather so-called 'non-traditional donors' from the region. All Central Asian countries, along with China, India, Iran and Saudi Arabia were represented, almost all at high level. India made a very high EUR 1 billion pledge for the next four years. Mr Amilhat also reminded the audience of the seldom discussed issue of remittances, which constitute an enormous contribution to developing countries' economies, and go straight into small but immediately productive investments. In this respect, the Afghan would very much benefit from getting training on the set of skills that would match the needs of e.g. Gulf countries where there is a strong Afghan private sector community.

Emmy Takahasi (UNHCR) briefly summed up the refugee situation: the pace of returns has increased significantly: 365 000 Afghans have already returned and 360 000 should return by the end of 2016. There are significant push factors behind 'voluntary returns', including harassment. UNHCR is working closely with Pakistani authorities to make sure the return process is voluntary and dignified. A major problem for returnees is the lack of jobs and livelihoods. In interviews conducted by UNHCR, 70 % of returnees who faced unexpected difficulties upon returning said those were mainly linked to the lack of employment. Ms Takahasi also explained that the different levels of support provided by EU Member States to returnees from Europe can create difficulties. She called for a more harmonised, coordinated approach by the EU, donors and other stakeholders in addressing these returns and their impact, in promoting asylum space and development actions in the return areas, while always paying attention to host communities.

2 Political challenges and perspectives 2016-2019 by Rhichard Ghiasy

2.1 Executive summary

Afghanistan's National Unity Government (NUG) has grown fragmented and ineffective, and is in the grip of political paralysis. The country is in a precarious state, experiencing simultaneous and mutually reinforcing political, socio-economic and security crises from which it has difficulty escaping. Unless the NUG and the National Assembly can set aside personal and sub-national interests in favour of national interests, it is unlikely that they will be able to effectively address the country's myriad woes. At the same time, popular discontent with the NUG continues to grow amid poor prospects for employment and security, and continuing rampant corruption. The Afghan government does not use foreign political and financial support effectively enough.

Looking ahead to 2017-2019, it is unlikely that the NUG will collapse, instead it will 'muddle through' ineffectively. Given the political crisis and current changes in the international environment, the prospects for an immediate peace settlement are slight. The EU and the international community's continued political and financial support to Afghanistan pledged at the October 2016 Brussels Conference is pivotal to Afghanistan's stability. The EU, and stakeholders, are recommended to consider greater engagement in alleviating tensions in South Asia through the facilitation of dialogue.

2.2 The political situation in Afghanistan

This research brief is divided into three components: the first two components discuss Afghanistan's current political challenges and perspectives (2016), and possible political challenges and perspectives in 2017-2019. In each component the implications for the social contract are presented. Given their importance, relevant foreign dynamics are also examined. The third component shares views on the October 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, and concludes with observations on the implications of Afghan political challenges and perspectives for the European Union (EU).

To understand why Afghanistan continues to struggle to achieve peace and stability, it is necessary to identify the principal forces working against this. Foreign invasion and interference on the one hand, and competition between members of Afghanistan's elite over power, resources, identity and ideology on the other, have been the two central drivers of Afghanistan's nearly four-decade-old hybrid conflict – a dynamic that largely continues today. These two drivers fundamentally hamper the nation- and state-building processes, and structurally hinder effective governance.

Therefore, Afghanistan finds itself in an ongoing political crisis. The power-sharing agreement between presidential candidates Dr Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah Abdullah, brokered in September 2014 by the United States of America's (USA) Secretary of State John Kerry in the wake of contested election results, led to the creation of the National Unity Government (NUG). As of the end of 2016, the NUG has not resulted in the hoped-for model of cooperative, cohesive and effective governance. While the NUG kept the lid on a potentially destabilising situation, the practical consequences of this extra-constitutional construct were not sufficiently anticipated.

Although both President Ghani and Chief Executive (CE) Abdullah are patriots, in practice they have failed to place pragmatism above their personal visions of good governance and development, and the interests of their constituencies. While Afghanistan has often had fissiparous tendencies, these have gained more traction since the NUG's formation than during the presidency of Hamid Karzai (2004-2014). The constituencies of President Ghani and CE Abdullah are factionalised, and the NUG has become fragmented and paralysed as a result. Instead of working together to resolve Afghanistan's convergence of crises, the

factions within both the NUG and the Shura-e-Mili – Afghanistan’s National Assembly or Parliament – bicker with, and plot against, each other in a bid to win more power and influence. In the NUG, the main division is due to the different views held by the faction loyal to President Ghani and the one loyal to CE Abdullah on the drivers that led to the ‘forced marriage’ between the two sides after the formation of the NUG. Each faction has diverging opinions on the balance of power and legitimacy of this partnership. The CE Abdullah faction claims that President Ghani has monopolised power, and that CE Abdullah and key cabinet constituents are structurally and increasingly marginalised in key policy decision-making processes. The President Ghani faction in turn accuses the CE Abdullah faction of attempting to run a parallel government. This dynamic, part of a more nuanced web of interests and drivers, is a major bipolarising factor in the NUG that will persist at least until the role of the CE or an executive prime minister is constitutionalised. Yet, this may not completely solve this problem. Another cause of the political paralysis is the long-standing tendency among members of the lower house of the Afghan Parliament to act on the basis of individual interests, which occasionally results in factionalisation along ethnic lines.

Besides the political crisis, Afghanistan also faces military and socio-economic crises. While the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) now operate largely independently and can, generally, stand their ground against armed opposition advances, the fight against armed opposition groups – most notably the Taliban – is in a deadlock. Afghan forces also remain highly dependent on international support (primarily from the USA) for airpower and expertise. The deadlock with armed opposition groups could endure many more years: these groups – and specifically the Taliban – have, largely, little inclination to either surrender or proactively pursue reconciliation through the peace process, especially given their territorial advances, the NUG’s internal political crisis and the potential changes in the level and nature of international support to the government. Moreover, it is widely believed that the current level of casualties being suffered by the Afghan forces is not sustainable, and will eventually lead to an even greater rate of attrition than is currently the case.

Elements within the Pakistani state are believed to be providing shelter to the armed opposition in Afghanistan as well as ideological, intelligence, military and monetary support. President Ghani’s 2015 initiative to seek rapprochement with Pakistan may have had much merit, but neither the pressure applied nor the incentives offered were sufficient. The gambit did not pay off: there was no reduction in insurgent violence and President Ghani experienced a severe political backlash. At the same time, despite initial positive statements from the NUG about the need to support the private sector and to create jobs, the economy was largely neglected. The economy benefited from a short-term boost between 2001 and 2014 due to the presence in Afghanistan of members of the international community (civilian and military personnel). That presence was reduced vastly by 2014 leading to a contraction and then stagnation of the economy.

Furthermore, as a condition of the 2014 power-sharing agreement, within two years, the NUG was to (a) complete a number of parliamentary electoral reforms, (b) hold parliamentary and district elections, and (c) hold a constitutional Loya Jirga to formalise the position of the CE and other governance structures. Voting and audit controversies surrounding the second round of the 2014 presidential election prompted louder calls for parliamentary electoral reforms, which were due to be implemented by September 2016. The reforms are intended to restore credibility to the voting system, after the flawed presidential elections in 2009 and 2014, and in preparation for the presidential election in 2019. Electoral reform of the latter is partially determined by the technicalities of parliamentary electoral reform. Any lengthy delay in the implementation of the parliamentary reforms or any attempt to water them down will therefore have a significant impact on the next presidential election.

Despite regular announcements of pending steps, there has been little meaningful progress towards implementing any of the reforms and structures envisaged by the power-sharing agreement, and progress will remain slow until there is a change in the dynamic of the NUG. At the core of the NUG lies a highly

complex web of clashing visions on nationhood and leadership. There are also competing ethnic interests in leadership and power at the formal and informal sub-national level, contextual ethno-religious factors, and technical challenges.

2.2.1 Implications of the political situation for the social contract

The postponement of political and electoral reform – along with the NUG's very public displays of infighting – deprives the NUG of its authority and legitimacy among the Afghan people. There is evidence that popular discontent is growing. Confidence in the NUG is declining amid poor prospects for employment and limited human security (i.e. recent military setbacks and territorial gains by the Taliban). President Ghani's impressive intellectual and professional background, and his election campaign promises to rebuild the economy and battle corruption, raised expectations, especially among the more technocratically oriented Afghan youth and among the international community. Despite some promising achievements, such as increasing the amount of domestic revenue collected by the government, these expectations have, for the most part, not been met. This failure is attributed to the built-in structural dysfunction of the NUG, as well as to President Ghani's tendencies towards over-centralisation and micro-management. Lack of confidence in the future has contributed to spiking levels of emigration to EU nations and elsewhere. In addition, Afghan returnees from Europe, Iran and Pakistan are likely to exacerbate the general sense of unease in Afghan society. These returnees, both those who have returned voluntarily and those who have been deported, carry notions of disillusionment: they have lost a major avenue of hope and need to resettle amid poor prospects of psychological and physical security. Another worrisome trend is evidence of growing ethnic polarisation – demonstrated through social media and by the creation of ethnic political movements (e.g. the Hazara-led 'Enlightenment Movement'). This growing tension is being exploited and heightened by so-called Islamic State (IS) through high-profile attacks on minorities. IS poses an ideological alternative and existential threat to the Taliban, resulting in fierce rivalry.

2.2.2 Foreign dynamics relevant to the Afghan political situation

Afghanistan has been coveted by great and regional powers for military and ideational strategic reasons on several occasions since its formation as a state in the 1800s, but since about 2014 international interest in Afghanistan has moved in a new direction and is gathering momentum. There now appears to be a convergence in the interests of great powers and a majority of regional powers towards stability in Afghanistan: the USA, the EU, China, Russia, India and Iran are, to a relative degree, supportive of stability in the country as they all fear the repercussions of instability to their own national interests. These interests have, for now it seems, overtaken geopolitical rivalry among the majority of these actors. Nevertheless, the level of trust between each of these actors as to the true strategic intentions of the others remains low. Still, this momentum is unique and is likely to endure, provided that (a) Afghanistan remains unstable and (b) none of these actors manages to align Afghanistan to itself or become overly influential in the country. Unfortunately, to date, the Afghan government and relevant international stakeholders have not tapped into this momentum efficiently. Moreover, at the regional level, the rivalry between India and Pakistan continues to negatively affect stability in Afghanistan (and much of South Asia) due to their interference and proxy activities in that country. This rivalry undermines South Asia's physical connectivity with Central Asia.

2.3 The prospective political situation in 2017-2019

Despite its significant internal conflicts and growing speculation over its future, the NUG will probably avoid full-scale collapse, but will almost certainly continue to be a disunited governing body. It is unlikely that the role of the CE, or an executive prime minister, will be constitutionalised in 2017-2018, as this would erode power from President Ghani and his supporters. However, some formal changes to the role of CE may be realised in this period. President Ghani continues to have the backing and trust of the US authorities

and he should thus be expected to be able to complete his presidential term. However, the likelihood of re-election in 2019 is slim, and only feasible if he achieves demonstrable successes for the Afghan people in 2017-2018. CE Abdullah and his constituency have a vested interest in sustaining the connection to power and corresponding monetary and patronage derivatives.

The NUG is therefore likely to 'muddle through' for the next two years, although with its internal divisions continuing to consume its attention and resources, it will likely remain ineffective in providing public goods, developing the economy or achieving an agreement with the armed opposition. Asymmetrical warfare and the subsequent military deadlock between the Afghan security forces and the Taliban will remain, assuming that the international community maintains its support. All of this will discourage investment (including that needed to develop the potential of Afghanistan's promising minerals sector), large regional economic integration initiatives and the growth of the licit private sector (which is needed to ease the country away from its dependence on the production of narcotics).

2.3.1 Implications of the political situation for the social contract

In the absence of demonstrable advances in security and the standard of living, there will likely be increased popular unrest, including among minorities. The possibility that this would go beyond demonstrations or lead to a widespread revolt or civil conflict may depend partly on the extent of discontent, but also on events which cannot be predicted. Otherwise, discontent will likely be articulated through the ballot box in 2019. The international community will need to pay closer attention than it did during the 2014 election to make sure that these elections will be freer and fairer. In the absence of sustainable licit employment opportunities, the vast illicit economy will continue and the lure of radical and violent interpretations of Islam – mostly driven by monetary reasons and frustration with official leadership – will remain strong. The informal economy will continue to function autonomously. Disillusioned returnees from Europe and Pakistan, especially if they are repatriated against their will, will add to the existing pool of disgruntled Afghans. Furthermore, the country's population is growing rapidly amid a backdrop of resource scarcity: the population could rise from the current estimated 33.4 million to 43.9 million by 2030.¹ This will put further stress on resources and on the government's ability to deliver services. It is also important to note that public political infighting and the endemic corruption in the political system unveiled by the media and other stakeholders do not set a good example of conduct for the country's youth who make up 64.7 per cent of the total population.² Migration and radicalisation tendencies will remain strong.

2.3.2 Foreign dynamics relevant to the Afghan political situation

The momentum driving the great power and regional power convergence of interest in a stable Afghanistan will continue, despite international aid community fatigue over commitment to Afghanistan and the country's enduring precarious state, more pressing conflict in Iraq and Syria, frozen conflict in Ukraine, global economic woes, and EU integration challenges. However, what this means for Afghanistan differs according to each actor's own more narrowly defined interests. While there is a broad convergence of interest to see stability in Afghanistan, the lack of strategic trust among a number of these actors about the others' intentions will likely remain significant. At this point it is impossible to say what changes will occur in US-Afghan policy under President Donald Trump; as a candidate, he spoke of aid cuts and reduced nation-building efforts overseas as part of his 'America first' perspective. If his administration follows through on these commitments, it will likely set stricter demands on, and increase the accountability of, the NUG. This might actually coerce the NUG to become somewhat more united and effective and thus might be a positive development. The policy of Pakistan vis-à-vis Afghanistan, and covert support to the Taliban, is unlikely to change substantially through 2017-2019. There is a slim chance that the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, specifically the corridor that runs through Pakistan known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and corresponding concern over stability in Balochistan Province will

somewhat lessen interference in Afghanistan. This remains to be seen. A rather disturbing prospect is that the IS's defeats in Syria and Iraq might drive this group or its members to Greater Central Asia: Afghanistan is a very likely destination.

2.4 Implications for EU-Afghanistan relations

The EU will need to – as it has already vowed to at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan on 5 October 2016 – continue to support Afghanistan closely politically and financially through 2017-2019 and the years following the next presidential election. Failure to do so, especially if other major donors also reduce their support, would, very likely, result in (a) the collapse of the NUG, (b) an increase in the number of military defeats suffered by the Afghan government at the hands of the armed opposition, (c) a rise in military fractionalisation, and (d) possibly a relapse by Afghanistan into some degree of civil war. EU expectations on delivery, impact of aid and NUG effectiveness should be set at a low (and therefore realistic) level.

What were the main discussion points of the Brussels Conference³ and what were the main political takeaways? The main items on the Brussels Conference agenda were discussions on Afghanistan-EU migration issues, a political solution towards achieving peace with the Taliban, international aid support and effectiveness, and the NUG's functioning. The latter included discussions on progress of anti-corruption efforts, and ongoing electoral reforms. Afghanistan presented the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF), a roadmap towards achieving self-reliance over the 2017-2020 period. This ambitious framework mostly focuses on state-building and development issues but it fails to underpin many of its objectives with clear methodologies on how they will be achieved.

At this 11th international donor conference on Afghanistan since the US-led intervention in 2001, the international community pledged to continue to support Afghanistan politically and financially over the next 4 years. Politically, this was a clear signal of international community commitment to Afghanistan's stability and reconstruction, and the NUG. This was an important signal at a crucial moment, not least financially: the total sum committed by the international community was around EUR 13.6 billion, of which the EU and its member states committed to provide around EUR 5 billion. In the strictest diplomatic terms, however, concerns over NUG cohesiveness and effectiveness were raised. It was stressed that NUG efforts should strive towards improving conditions for Afghans, so that they stay in their country, instead of seeking better lives in the EU. Part of the rationale behind the political and financial pledges was also to create better conditions for the tens of thousands of 'irregular' Afghan migrants in the EU whose asylum applications were rejected and that are to be sent back to Afghanistan. A political arrangement, 'EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward on Migration issues', was reached three days before the conference.⁴

In addition to these pledges, the EU could contribute in other more innovative ways. Above all other factors, the India-Pakistan rivalry impacts the stability of the entire South Asia region and, unless this is addressed, it is unlikely that Pakistan will disengage from its interference in Afghan affairs. The EU could consider collaborating with extra-regional and regional stakeholders – most notably China, Russia and the USA – and relevant international platforms to contribute to resolving fundamental disputes between India and Pakistan through facilitation of dialogue. As long as these disputes and the 'blame-game' continues, there is little incentive for the Pakistani military establishment and a number of non-state actors in Pakistan to discontinue their policy towards Afghanistan. The EU could also take on a more active role in contributing to dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and possibly the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) if it is reinvigorated. A more active role for the EU could be even more critical if the USA lowers its level of engagement.

Finally, the EU and other members of the international community must set tighter metrics and parameters for NUG accountability on, for example, unity, public goods provision, and corruption mitigation. The international community has become more willing to entertain the idea of conditionality, although it must also be willing to actually follow through on the consequences. Above all else, the use of conditionality

must be done in a carefully thought-out way that contributes positively to governance and development in Afghanistan. Unless NUG cohesion and effectiveness improves, a peace process is completed successfully and large-scale employment opportunities are created, Afghanistan will continue to pose a risk of insecurity far beyond its borders. In this scenario, the growing migration tendencies to the EU will continue.

3 Afghanistan's security situation anno 2016: an overview, by Dr Mona Kanwal Sheikh

The major developments in the security situation of Afghanistan during the past two years relate to the state of the insurgency, the increase in violence, militant actors and Internally Displaced People (IDPs), but also to a moderate progress in peace initiatives. Some of the challenges identified in the Afghan security sector include issues of loyalty and high desertion rates, the level of corruption and the lack of full control over government militias, human rights violations and the lack of intelligence capabilities and gathering. These challenges reflect some fundamental areas that future EU projects and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission need to take into consideration. The EU could further play a more active role in facilitating the Afghan peace and reconciliation process.

3.1 Executive summary

This briefing provides an overview of the main security challenges of Afghanistan today. Though there are also areas of progress, the main objective of this briefing is to show where the international community can support the Afghan security sector, and hence also where there is room for improvement.

The first section points at the major developments on the Afghan territory during 2015 and 2016. The Taliban have been on an offensive and gained territory and particularly they have made inroads into strategic areas where the movement can control the roads. At the same time, there is an active fight between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the Taliban over 20 % of the Afghan territory. How the final battle will fall out is unknown.

A second factor that has an impact on the situation on the ground is the increase in violent incidents, the increase in militant actors and in the number of Internally Displaced People and Afghan returnees from the European Union (EU), Pakistan and Iran. The increase of violence is related both to the force used by insurgents and the government's forces. The increase in militant actors is due to the military operation launched by the Pakistani army in the tribal areas of Pakistan, and the entrance of the so-called Islamic State (IS) into Afghanistan.

A third development relates to progress in the peace initiatives. Here the Afghan government has signed a peace deal with an old insurgent movement that is not a part of the Taliban. At the same time, Pakistan has hosted peace talks with representatives of the Afghan Taliban and Afghanistan's official Peace Council.

The second section outlines the prevailing challenges that analysts and observers have identified in the Afghan security sector. These are primarily issues of loyalty and high desertion rates within the ANSF, but also the high level of corruption that still haunts all sectors of government in Afghanistan. Additional challenges are the lack of full control over government militias and the human rights violations that follow the government's use of local militias. Finally, there is a lack of intelligence capabilities and gathering, which is one of reasons why the Taliban have been on an offensive during the past couple of years.

The third section points at selected initiatives, projects and missions taken by the international community. First NATO's Resolute Support Mission is described together with the status of the ANSF. Adding to this, the United States (US) decision of reapplying combat-force is mentioned as an initiative that might be counterproductive in relation to weakening the recruitment capabilities of the Taliban. In this section, the challenges that the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) faced in this country are outlined in order to learn from the experience of shutting down a project that was still needed. The final part of this section points at the prospects for strengthening the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan, and the role the EU could play as a facilitator.

The final section sums up the recommendations to the EU, and consists of overall recommendations that relate to the way the EU could design projects, but also of specific recommendations related to the areas that the EU could support in order to promote stability and development in Afghanistan.

3.2 2015-16: What has happened during the last years?

This briefing should be read on the background of the two-day international aid conference that took place in Brussels on 4-5 October 2016 and was co-hosted by the European Union and the government of Afghanistan. The conference brought together 75 countries and 26 international organisations and agencies. The EU and its Member States pledged up to EUR 5 billion in support of Afghanistan's development priorities for the period 2017-2020. At the conference, the participants endorsed the reform agenda presented by the Afghan government. The funds are meant to finance the strategic development priorities of the Afghan government, and are thus allocated on the basis of local Afghan initiatives and suggestions.

This briefing focuses on the challenges that prevail in the Afghan security sector and can be used to evaluate the use of EU funding in this particular sector. The briefing will also provide some overall recommendations to the EU that are based on the observations and analysis of the author.

3.2.1 Insurgency in advance

The NATO forces concluded the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission by the end of 2014. A new NATO-led mission, Resolute Support, commenced on 1 January 2015 with a mandate to solely train, advise, and assist the ANSF. However, during the first part of 2015, Afghanistan also saw an increase in insurgency operations that led to the Taliban's take-over of territory. The Taliban have made offensives in Kandahar, Uruzgan, in a number of strategic areas in the northern province of Baghlan over the past two years and in Helmand, where large areas are under their control. In areas like Zabul and Uruzgan, the Taliban also took control over roads. The Taliban have also made inroads to part of the Ring Road, which links Kabul to the north (Felbab-Brown, 2016).

The Taliban managed to take temporarily control over the city of Kunduz in September 2015 – an event that shook the international community that is working towards the aim of making a complete security transition, i.e. letting the Afghan National Security Forces be responsible for the security of Afghanistan, by the end of 2016. Reports suggest that the Taliban control 10 % of Afghanistan and are actively fighting the government troops over yet another 20 % (Gandhara, 2016).

3.2.2 Increase in violence, militant actors and displacement

In response to the insurgency in advance, the ANSF have conducted several military operations, beginning in late 2015 and continuing throughout 2016. Among the consequences of the increased military activities are the displacement of hundreds of families and the erosion of local communities' trust in the government (Ali, 2016). The Taliban are allegedly also undertaking relief work among the IDPs, which adds to their mobilisation capacity³.

The Haqqani Network, which maintains distinct command, and particular lines of operations work more closely with the Taliban (Felbab-Brown, 2016), and have caused some of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan (UNAMA, 2016a). The number of civilians killed during government military operations also

³ Interview with an Afghan parliamentarian, November 2016. On the general point about how the relief work undertaken by militant movements can enhance the recruitment capabilities of the insurgents, see Sheikh, 2016b.

increased during 2015 (Human Right Watch, 2016). Schools are hijacked for military use both by insurgents and by pro-government militias (UNAMA, 2016b).

There has also been a spill-over of militants from the Pakistan army's operation Zarb-e-Azb, launched in the North Waziristan tribal area of Pakistan (these include Uzbek, Arab and Pakistani militants). Adding to this, the so-called Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) announced its presence in Afghanistan in January 2015. ISK is mainly present in southern Nangarhar. Reports indicate that they constitute between 1 500 and 3 000 fighters. IS militants collaborate with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and elements of the Pakistani Taliban, but are at war with the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants (Sheikh, 2016a). Primarily however, they are fighting the Afghan State, attacking both civilians and the ANSF.

While Europe has been focusing on the asylum seekers to Europe (in 2015, 180 000 Afghans applied for asylum in Europe [Felbab-Brown, 2016]), there is almost 1 million Internally Displaced People in Afghanistan (Human Right Watch, 2016).⁴ Adding to this, more than 300 000 Afghan refugees have been repatriated from Pakistan since July 2016, according to the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Siyal, 2016). Also, Iran has been deporting Afghan refugees. Human Rights Watch has reported that Iran has been recruiting thousands of Afghan refugees to fight in pro-government armed groups in neighbouring Syria. Those who have been deported to Afghanistan as a punishment allegedly refused the coerced fighting (Strickland, 2016).

Displacement and the lack of a structure to deal with the returnees have increased the dissatisfaction with the government and its forces, while making the displaced vulnerable for recruitment for insurgent groups (Sheikh, 2016b).

3.2.3 New advancement in peace initiatives

In September 2016, a peace deal was signed between Gulbuddin Hekmatyar from Hezb-e Islami and President Ashraf Ghani. This was portrayed as the first major peace achievement of the last 15 years. However, Hezb-e Islami has not been actively fighting on the battlefield, and it can be questioned whether the Taliban will follow the example, considering the different aims of the two groups, and their history as enemies (Osman, 2016).

In July 2015 the first direct, and publicly known, meeting between the High Peace Council of Afghanistan and the Taliban was hosted by Pakistan. This meeting was a more significant development since it brought together the two conflicting parties, though with no immediate results. Peace initiatives are nothing new in the Afghan context: Afghanistan started its reach-out activities in 2005, and launched the so-called Program Takhim-E-Sohl (PTS). PTS failed, partly due to inadequate funding and the lack of domestic Afghan political support. There have also been reports that in the late 2008 there had been Saudi-brokered talks between Afghan officials and the Taliban. In 2010, Afghanistan's High Peace Council was formed, among other things to initiate peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. In September 2011, however, the head of the program Burhanuddin Rabbani, an old rival of the Taliban, was assassinated and the faith in the process decreased (Sheikh & Greenwood, 2013).

⁴ Reports say that at least 24 000 people have fled Kunduz since October when the Taliban attacked the city for the second time in a year. Tens of thousands of Afghans have fled the provincial capitals such as Tarin Kot, Pul-e-Khumri, Lashkar Gah and Farah, which are under attack by the Taliban. See Rashid, 2016.

3.3 Challenges identified in the Afghan security sector

3.3.1 Divided loyalties and desertion

Though it is not an easy task to build up an army from the ground, one of the challenges that have been pointed out by looking back at the past couple of years is that there is still a divided loyalty among the Afghan security forces. For instance, the way that the Taliban could take over Kunduz revealed that some of the units did not resist (Vestenskov, 2016). At the same time strong ethnic and tribal loyalties constitute a continuous challenge for the way the civil population perceive the security forces and its uneven composition of the different tribes. There are also high desertion rates and inactive soldiers in the Afghan National Army that are sometimes termed ‘ghost soldiers’ – persons on the payroll but not on the battlefield, which has been pointed out to be a challenge in e.g. Helmand (Felbab-Brown, 2016).

3.3.2 Corruption and the lack of control

The above problems are linked to a high level of corruption. The ‘loyalty for sale’ issue is a challenge not only for the Afghan National Army, but also for the Afghan Local Police (a local defence force against Taliban insurgents with no arresting or investigative functions, but part of the Ministry of Interior, established in 2010). This is supposedly also due to the lower level of salary as compared to the National Police Force (Vestenskov, 2016). The fact that the Afghan government is increasingly using militiamen to assist the Afghan Local Police also points to the danger of not being able to control forces that are on the government payroll.

3.3.3 Human rights violations

An issue that relates to the lack of control, and that the international community needs to be aware of, is that the Afghan Local Police and pro-government militias continue to recruit children (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Together with corruption, the violation of human rights is one of the fundamental issues that call for the international community to work more in a direction that can assure the rightful application of aid-money and prevent that it becomes linked to both human rights violations and corruption.

3.3.4 Poor intelligence

One of the reasons that observers point at in order to explain the increasingly defensive role of the ANSF (and similarly the more offensive posture of the Taliban and the Haqqani network) is the poor state of intelligence gathering. The knowledge about Taliban strongholds and movements has declined due to the lack of certain capabilities and equipment. When NATO’s ISAF mission was active, the intelligence gathering was happening at another level (Vestenskov, 2016), while the ANSF lack both surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities (AREU, 2016). Capacity building in that respect is vital to change the dynamics.

The challenges identified within the Afghan security sector are linked to, and reflect, the challenges that are also inherent in other sectors of government: the tensions in the unity government between the two old rivals (President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah) make decision-making challenging. At the same time there is still significant progress to be made when it comes to electoral reforms, empowerment of women, combating corruption, countering narcotics trafficking, ensuring a stable security environment, jobs creation and improving economic opportunities (these are some of the enduring challenges that were also mentioned by NATO at its summit held on 8-9 July 2016). Addressing the challenges within the security sector would require addressing these enduring challenges as well.

3.4 How does the future look? Initiatives and prospects

3.4.1 The new NATO mission

The shift from nation building to capacity building that took place in 2009 with US President Barack Obama was presumably based on the realisation that nation-building would require means that were larger than the will of the Americans. Reflecting this change, the new NATO mission, namely the Resolute Support Mission that replaced the ISAF mission, has capacity building at its core. However, the Taliban take-over of Kunduz, one of the largest cities of Afghanistan, though temporarily, pointed out the fact that there is still a long way before the ANSF will be able to operate without the support of international forces. When the Taliban took over Kunduz they put two districts under sustained attacks, and reports say that no reinforcements or logistical support arrived when the second district (the Dasht-i-Archi district) came under attack.

The weakness of the ANSF raises the question of whether the status of Afghan nationhood will continuously be challenged by the strong ethnic and tribal identities. Ultimately, this is a more fundamental question of whether the national army, and thereby the focus of the NATO mission, will always face these structural constraints.

The Resolute Support Mission would need to address how to handle the challenges identified above (desertion/divided loyalties, corruption, institutional/systemic deficiencies). Particularly the high level of corruption puts the NATO mission in a Catch-22. Afghanistan's defence and security sector has been ranked in the highest risk categories for corruption according to Transparency International's Defence and Security Program in its 2015 Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index (Transparency International, 2015). Some of the causes of this are patronage and nepotism, low pay and ethnic favouritism.

3.4.2 Re-activating US combat force

The USA still has around 9 800 troops present in Afghanistan. In mid-2016 US president Obama announced that he hoped to reduce the number of troops to 5 500 by early 2017, and wanted to cut down the number to 8 400 in 2016 – this, however, never happened. In June 2016, President Obama also approved a policy to give the US military greater ability to accompany and enable Afghan forces to fight the Taliban; the decision gives them the ability to fight the Taliban directly, and more flexibility to carry out airstrikes or wage ground combat. NATO members and other partners, however with a different mandate, have contributed 6 000 troops. The US troops could stay due to the bilateral security agreement that President Ghani signed shortly after he took office. It is however unclear what role the increased American use of air force and counterterrorism operations will play when it comes to the recruitment abilities of insurgent groups. The danger is that it will again lead to an escalation of the conflict, and create further pressure on the ANSF. US involvement is an issue that divides Afghan society, but so far one of the main grievances of the Taliban is that they will continue fighting until the US forces are present in Afghanistan (Sheikh & Greenwood, 2013).

3.4.3 The EU's focus on the police

The EU has been supporting the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) focused on the Afghan National Police. Upon the conclusion of the EUPOL project, the European External Action Service (EEAS) made a public statement about the achievements of the progress in criminal policing, training institutions, leadership, good governance and female policing. Yet, a more critical assessment of the outcome would point at the fact that the capacity-building project had an abrupt end, and the process of training and capacity building had not reached its final aim. Such rupture had a negative impact on the

long-term effects of the EU funding, since no one could be handed over the project to at that point. The way the EUPOL project ended points at the need for the EU decision-making process to be closer to the practitioners on the ground.

The USA has simultaneously been supporting the training of the Local Police Forces. It is crucial to look at whether the different police training initiatives are/have been playing well together on the ground. One of the lessons that international stakeholders should have taken from the first decade of international involvement since 2001 was the lack of collaboration between the coalition partners and the different areas where different countries operated. Some of the challenges to the EUPOL mission that observers have pointed out include the lack of understanding and cooperation among NATO, the US troops and EUPOL, but also the more structural difficulties in carrying out an isolated mission in an environment where illiteracy, corruption and drug addiction prevail (Suroush, 2015).

3.4.4 The uncertain future and the role of the EU

One of the main questions in an environment where the Taliban and other militant actors in Afghanistan show no signs of weakness, and where we do not know whether IS militants will gain more influence, is how peace talks will succeed. The exact composition of the peace councils, and exactly who has participated in the previous negotiations and peace talks, has proved to be vital for the way the Taliban have viewed the talks and their willingness to participate. Persons that have long relations of enmity with the Taliban, for instance, should not lead a reconciliation process. In addition, there has been confusion about who the main parts in the peace talks should be. The international community, especially the EU, could do more to facilitate the peace and reconciliation processes. More than 15 years of fighting have not been able to eradicate the insurgent groups, and more could be done by intensifying the focus on conflict resolution. A review of the past attempts to reach out to the Taliban and an outline of the diplomatic instruments that are vital in order to facilitate successful trust building measures and talks are much needed.

3.5 Recommendations

At the Brussels conference that took place on 4-5 October 2016, the EU and its Member States pledged up to EUR 5 billion in support of Afghanistan's development priorities for the period 2017-2020. This commitment should be followed up with a focus on how and where the EU should allocate the funding in order to ensure quality and results in the EU-funded projects and avoid repeating some of the mistakes that have been observed.

Based on the above observations, below are some of the **overall issues** that the author finds the EU should take into account:

- **Capacity building on both levels:** the EU should keep its focus on capacity building, but in future projects the local and national levels should be more integrated.
- **Lessons learned:** the experience from the EUPOL training mission, which had an abrupt ending, should be taken into account in order to avoid the loss of the experience gathered. It is crucial to evaluate whether the different police training initiatives are/have been playing well together on the ground.
- **Better collaboration:** there is a need for better collaboration and communication between different projects undertaken by European countries and the USA. Some of the challenges to the EUPOL mission that observers have pointed out include the lack of understanding and cooperation among NATO, the US troops and EUPOL.

Based on the above observation, below are **specific areas** where the author finds that the EU could play an active role:

- Support the Afghan government in creating an infrastructure to integrate the returnees into Afghan society. The EU should support the Afghan government in creating a structure to deal with the hundreds of thousands Afghan returnees (from Europe, Pakistan and Iran) and help them resettle. The structure should also take into consideration the large number of IDPs.
- Support initiatives that can counter the corruption in the government bodies, and in future project designs be aware of the negative impact that a low salary structure can have on the loyalty of a government institution (e.g. the police).
- Assure that aid is not connected to human rights violations. The violation of human rights is one of the fundamental issues that call for the international community to work in a direction that can assure the rightful application of aid-money and prevent that it becomes linked to both human rights violations and corruption.
- Support the capacity building of the Afghan intelligence capabilities, which is vital to changing the dynamics where the Taliban are on the offensive and the ANSF is on the defensive.
- Collaborate with NATO around electoral reforms, empowerment of women, combating corruption, countering narcotics trafficking, ensuring a stable security environment, jobs creation and improving economic opportunities.
- Create linkages of communication between the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the projects on ground. The way the EUPOL project ended points out the need for the EU decision-making process to be closer to the practitioners on the ground.
- The international community, especially the EU, could do more to facilitate the peace and reconciliation processes, which should be based on local stakeholders from Afghanistan rather than the regional actors. An initial review of the past attempts to reach out to the Taliban, and an outline of the diplomatic instruments that are vital in order to facilitate successful trust-building measures and talks, are much needed.
- The EU should support research on collaboration patterns between insurgent groups: the development on the ground happens so rapidly that there is strategic value in monitoring the collaboration patterns among the different insurgent actors on the Afghan ground. This could be done in a joint effort with NATO. For the EU this is strategically important in order to be able to facilitate a proper reconciliation process (as pointed out above).

4 An Afghan path to peace and development, by Dr Arne Strand

A number of contextual challenges are likely to influence implementation of the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2017-2021, and thereby EU support through its Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for Afghanistan 2014-2020.

The ANPDF aims to achieve self-reliance and welfare improvements for the Afghan people. This is to be achieved through a development strategy that prioritises four areas: 1) Governance and State Effectiveness; 2) Social Capital and Nation Building; 3) Economic Growth and Job Creation; and 4) Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion, with further thematic priorities. The plan is ambitious and emphasises economic growth as a prerequisite for development, which might be difficult to achieve without a functional peace agreement and sustained donor engagement and funding.

The EU Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) is well targeted both to support and supplement the ANPDF, although it necessitates thorough and continuous risk assessment as well as dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan (GOA).

The four National Priority Programmes (NPPs) highlight important areas within the ANPDF that require additional attention and funding. All NPPs are ambitious and some will be particularly challenging to implement, such as urban development, since it will have to respond to the needs of returnees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) seeking protection, jobs and education.

To achieve the rather ambitious goals that have been set, both the GOA and the European Union need to acknowledge contextual constraints, work to secure a peace agreement, emphasise the quality of services, and maintain a constant dialogue on how results can best be achieved within a realistic time frame.

4.1 Executive Summary

Afghanistan is faced with a number of contextual challenges which are likely to influence implementation of the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework, and thereby the European Union (EU) Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020. Despite massive investments and improvements in areas such as education, health, rural development and infrastructure, so far these have had very limited impact on reducing the overall poverty rate. Increased insecurity, a weakened economy and a high degree of internal displacement, return and urbanisation are likely to pose additional challenges to a fragmented government and an administration with limited implementation capacity.

The main aim of the ANPDF is to achieve self-reliance and welfare improvements for the Afghan people. The strategy has four prioritised areas, with a number of thematic sub-priorities: 1) Governance and State Effectiveness; 2) Social Capital and Nation-Building; 3) Economic Growth and Job Creation; and 4) Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion, with further thematic sub-priorities. While all areas are relevant and in accordance with identified needs, the plan is overly ambitious, vulnerable to contextual challenges. It is thereby dependent on major improvements in governance and administration together with the willingness/ability to address corruption, mismanagement and, not least, sustained donor engagement as well as funding.

The MIP – with its support to 1) Agriculture and Rural Development; 2) Health; 3) Policing and Rule of Law and 4) Democratisation and Accountability – provides support to key areas in the ANPDF and supplements other areas necessary for a sustainable development process (such as health, rule of law and accountability). The EU is, however, advised to undertake thorough and continuous risk assessment and enter a dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan on mitigating risks and adjusting programmes to ensure the maximum impact in a fragile development setting.

The four National Priority Programmes – 1) the Citizens' Charter; 2) Women's Economic Empowerment; 3) Urban Development; and 4) the Comprehensive National and Agricultural Infrastructure – aim to focus on and strengthen key areas within the ANPDF. The NPPs have ambitious goals: the Citizens' Charter will depend on close coordination between involved ministries and the development of community councils to reach their potential, women's economic empowerment will need differentiated strategies for different parts of Afghanistan, while the urban development programme must be prepared to respond to the needs of the increasing number of returnees and Internally Displaced People.

The SMAF (Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework) is framed around 10 principles for mutual accountability between the GOA and the donors, six selected focus areas accompanied by detailed indicators and a timeline for deliverables in 2016. While the areas and indicators are very relevant, the timeline was far too ambitious and most activities are unlikely to be implemented within the set timeframe. Revisiting and renegotiating the timeline must now, therefore, be undertaken as a matter of urgency without reducing the overall ambition of ensuring mutual accountability.

With the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (which took place on 4-5 October 2016) as an important milestone, the GOA and the European Commission are advised to acknowledge the contextual constraints identified and include them in the planning and implementation process of the ANPDF and the MIP. This must include support to reach a negotiated peace agreement, reduce fragility and improve the conditions for sustainable development as well as increased access throughout the country, emphasising the quality of the services over the quantity and maintaining a constant dialogue on how reforms and results can best be achieved within a realistic time frame.

4.2 Contextual framework and challenges

Afghanistan has been in continuous armed conflict since the late 1970s. Deep internal divisions along ethnic, tribal and religious lines and long-standing vulnerability to interference by neighbouring countries have further increased State fragility.

Following the drawdown of international forces in 2014, insecurity increased further with the Taliban gaining ground across the country, leading to an increase in civilian casualties. The economy plummeted, resulting in high unemployment, especially amongst the youth, together with increased urbanisation and outmigration. A contested election in 2014 led to the United States-brokered National Unity Government (NUG), with Ashraf Ghani as President and Abdullah Abdullah in a new Chief Executive position. The NUG struggles to find a functioning form and agree upon appointments, whilst attempting to address the numerous challenges that confront Afghanistan.

Since 2001 Afghanistan has received over USD 57 billion in official development assistance (Norges Offentlige Utredninger / Official Norwegian Reports, 2016: p. 40). The Afghan government has long demanded that donors channel their development support through national systems and align it with Afghan priorities. In 2012 the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework established that donors should route at least 50 % of their development funding through the national budget, and align 80 % of the aid to the National Priority Programmes. This goal has yet to be met (World Bank, 2016).

The deteriorating security situation from 2005 onwards created pressures in being able to provide direct assistance to insecure areas based on short-term military priorities, which meant that sustainable results were difficult to achieve. Monitoring and evaluating all types of assistance became more difficult, particularly by independent actors.

The Afghan government is totally dependent on international assistance, which has averaged over USD 4 billion annually and accounted for 90 % of total financial inflows in the period (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2015a). A governance system based on nepotism and patronage has developed, and its widespread corruption has proved difficult to curb (Strand, 2014). Moreover, limited State capacity has had

a negative multiplier effect on provision of development assistance. A Danida evaluation (Thomson, 2012) emphasises the shortage of management and implementation capacity within the Afghan government, particularly at provincial level.

Partly for these reasons, several donors have channelled much of their funding through trust funds, notably the World Bank-managed Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). Trust funds have also promised benefits in terms of coordination, strengthening the Afghan State and effective exercise of fiduciary responsibility. 70 % of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) was provided on-budget through four multi-donor trust funds; the remaining 30 % was provided to the budget directly, mainly in the form of project support.

It appears that the total assistance, despite major achievements in areas such as education, health, rural development and infrastructure, has had very limited effect on overall poverty reduction. The World Bank reported a slight decrease in poverty while, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, 2014: p. xii), poverty rates have increased from 33 % in 2005 to 35.8 % in 2015. The illicit economy, resulting primarily from drug production, was in 2011 estimated to provide one-sixth of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). This drug economy has proved highly resistant against donor efforts to curb it (Byrd & Mansfield, 2012).

4.3 The Afghan National Peace and Development Framework (2017-21)

The Afghan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-21, sets a vision '[...] to achieve self-reliance and increase the welfare of our people. We will achieve this by building a productive and broad-based economy that creates jobs, putting an end to corruption, criminality and violence, and establish the rule of law.' (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2016: p. 3). While providing further details on their vision, the Government of Afghanistan concludes by stating that '[A]chieving these goals requires a collective effort to overcome fragmentation, increased accountability, and introduce proper policies for sustainable growth'. The recent Brussels Conference on Afghanistan endorsed the plan that sets a common reference for the GOA and the donor community.

The ANPDF sets out four development priorities that will briefly be presented here to enable a comparison with the choice of sectors in the European Commission's Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020.

The ANPDF priorities are: 1) Governance and State Effectiveness; 2) Social Capital and Nation Building; 3) Economic Growth and Job Creation; and 4) Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion.

4.3.1 Governance and State Effectiveness

The argument made is that security, unrest and underdevelopment are inextricably linked; building the legitimacy of the State is, therefore, an important goal in and of itself. There are four sub-elements identified, all highly challenging to achieve in the present context.

Reforming the public sector

It is important to acknowledge the importance of the public sector: the aim is to reform management systems, oversight and incentives combined with continuation of the civil service and public administration reforms.

Rooting out Corruption

While reiterating the commitment to root out corruption, reference is made to the Presidential Action Plan that combines prevention with leadership from the Supreme Court and Attorney General's Office 'to end

impunity and send the corrupt to justice' (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2016: p. 13), referring to a set of reforms already launched.

Strengthening Sub-national Governance

Acknowledging the weak State: the aim is to provide a permanent physical and administrative government presence in all districts, combined with increasing the share of spending through the subnational governments and reforming the electoral process.

Countering Narcotics

The narcotics industry and the drug trade is seen to fuel the insurgency and undermine state legitimacy. Reference is made to the 2015 National Drug Action Plan and recognition that successful reforms require long-term commitment, provision of alternative livelihood for farmers and the strict enforcement of laws against money laundering and drug trafficking.

4.3.2 Social Capital and Nation Building

The GOA identifies three core elements of nation building: 1) the citizens must trust the justice system; 2) the State and its officials must develop a positive presence and ability to deliver locally valued services; and 3) the country must use its rich cultural heritage to build a national identity and sense of citizenship. There are two sub-elements:

Reforming the Justice Sector

Under the slogan 'Access to justice for all Afghans' the emphasis is placed on large scale reform plans for the Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office.

Building up Afghanistan's National Identity

With the aim of advancing pluralism, reference is made to the National Trust Fund for Cultural Heritage and the need to ensure that school curricula as well as teacher training programmes encourage a pluralistic citizenship in young people; domestic tourism should also be promoted.

4.3.3 Economic Growth and Job Creation

This sector is emphasised and has the largest number of sub-sections. The argument is made for advancing regional integration, improving governance, and transforming the productive sectors to affect growth-inducing reforms and investments. The National Priority Programmes discussed below are envisioned to further national productivity. There are seven sub-elements:

Comprehensive Agricultural Development Programme

The GOA acknowledges that Afghanistan's GDP rises and falls in accordance with performance in the agricultural sector – a source of jobs for at least 40 % of the population. Growth is hampered by under-investment in water resources development, poor quality input of seeds and fertilisers, natural resources degradation and weak systems for marketing. The vision is to change Afghanistan from an importing and agrarian country to an agro-industrial exporting nation.

Private Sector Development Programme

Creating an enabling environment for the private sector is described as a pillar of the growth strategy, aimed at attracting some of the private capital that now is invested in the Gulf and elsewhere. The aim is for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises to become an engine of the Afghan economy and thereby create millions of jobs.

Mineral and Resource Development Programme

Afghanistan has rich sources of minerals and hydrocarbons that can play an important role as drivers of economic growth; this sector is presently prone to illegal extraction and smuggling. The aim is, therefore, to accelerate progress on the legislative and regulatory framework, combined with investments in infrastructure and increased transparency and accountability.

Energy and Infrastructure Development

Farmers and traders need good (and safe) roads to reach domestic and international markets. To ensure that only qualified firms are selected for road building, the GOA will establish a Road Authority, a Road Fund and a Transportation Authority as important ways of ensuring a harmonised response to expanding transport needs. Electricity generation and transmission is another priority area, with plans for investment in the national grid and renewable energy for residential and isolated areas.

Advancing Regional Integration

The aim is to make use of Afghanistan's location to become a transit hub within Asia, provided that the conflict risk is reduced to manageable levels. This will include roads, railroads, energy projects and the Central Asian digital highway.

Increasing Labour Productivity and Investing in Human Capital

The challenge here is that Afghanistan's skills are not well aligned with market demands. The aim is, therefore, to invest in vocational education, engineering, managerial skills, the service industry as well as reforms to make the labour force more flexible and responsive.

Urban Development Programme

The aim is for the cities to become drivers for growth, drawing here on the Urban National Priority Programme that sets out more concrete aims. These include legal and regulatory reforms, the direct election of mayors, building infrastructure etc.

4.3.4 Poverty reduction and Social Inclusion

This section of the strategy combines different sources of investment to improve growth and productivity with targeted programmes to help the poor improve their skills and access opportunities. The full potential for poverty reduction, not least for marginalised groups, depends on the ability to improve security, policing and the rule of law. There are three sub-elements:

The Citizens' Charter

The Citizens' Charter (CC) is an NPP, and an expanded version of the National Solidarity Programme that also aims at increasing access to quality (not just quantity) health and education services, ensuring better linkages between education and the job market, and providing basic rural infrastructure and agricultural services. The Community Development Councils (CDCs) remain the entry point for both local governance and development activities. They can serve as an entry point for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in securing their interests as part of the development process.

Women's Empowerment

The aim is to ensure the full political, social and economic participation of Afghan women in national development through the implementation of United Nations (UN) Resolution 1325 and the NPP for Economic Empowerment of Women as part of Afghanistan's Gender Strategy.

Social protection

It is recognised that Afghanistan cannot afford large scale social protection programmes, but might be able to increase and improve the pro-poor spending aimed at improving skills, productivity and access to labour intensive job schemes. One suggestion to protect the most marginalised is to establish an agency that manages cash transfers to pensioners, disabled and others entitled to social protection.

It is, in sum, a very ambitious plan that depends on reduced conflict and violence, improved governance together with continued international financial support and backing to meet set goals. All will require a functional government that demonstrate the willingness and ability to implement set goals.

4.4 The European Commission's Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020

In order to assess the prospects of future EU support for Afghanistan, the ANPDF must be set alongside the priorities laid down in the EU Development Cooperation Instrument outlined in the 2014-2020 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme between the European Commission and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The overall European Union strategic objectives for the implementation of development aid for the project period are to: a) promote peace, stability and security; b) reinforce democracy; c) encourage economic and human development; and d) foster the rule of law and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of women and children. The choice of four sectors (see below) aims to provide a balanced approach that fits with the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States from 2011 and is consistent with the EU's Agenda for Change. In addition to the sectors, there is a set of cross-cutting priorities, namely: 1) gender sensitivity and human rights; 2) sustainable economic growth and job creation; 3) anti-corruption and transparent management of public finances; and 4) counter-narcotics. All of these are included in the ANPDF.

4.4.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Here the programme identifies five priority areas: 1) food and nutrition security; 2) rural livelihoods and employment; 3) natural resources management; 4) reduced dependency of income from poppy; and 5) building institutional capacity.

Although covered under different headings in the ANPDF, these EU priority areas match well with and support Afghan aims and priorities. The agricultural sector has historically provided income/livelihood for up to 70 % of the Afghan population and the sector is, therefore, central for job generation in general and income opportunities, particularly for women. Equally important is the potential to ensure food and nutrition security to large segments of the population. However, there exists here an enormous challenge to reduce the income from poppy production. This sector, despite its illegal character, provides substantial income to poor farmers and daily labourers that often have no other means of earning similar levels of income, except through job migration to neighbouring or Gulf countries.

Large-scale increases in agricultural production require massive investments in irrigations schemes. Such projects can, on the one hand, provide a major opportunity for local employment but, on the other, instigate conflict with neighbouring countries, such as Tajikistan, Iran and Pakistan, that share either the water resources or outflows. There is, therefore, a need for diplomatic efforts to reduce potential conflict from large-scale irrigation schemes. A further concern relates to natural resources management. It must be ensured that irrigation projects not only assist but also contribute to improved and sustainable water management rather than environmental degradation and lowered water tables.

From a gender perspective, the local processing of agricultural products and obtaining access to markets will be essential to ensure income for women, although fathers and husbands might have to be involved to ensure acceptance.

4.4.2 Health

Remarkable progress has been made in securing access to health care since 2001. However, there is continuing concern that, when compared with other countries health indicators remain low, including: short life expectancy, the prevalence of chronic malnutrition and very high infant (under five) and maternal mortality. The three EU priority areas are: 1) Expanded support to Basic Packages of Health Services (BPHS) and Essential Packages of Hospital Services (EPHS); 2) Nutrition; and 3) Strengthening government capacity through support to the Ministry of Public Health.

This area is not listed as a key priority in the ANPDF as such, but the latter identifies institutional fragmentation and low quality services delivery as issues in need of attention. There is moreover an acknowledgement that improved quality of education and health services will help avoid extreme disparities.

The EU priority on health will, therefore, fill an important gap in the ANPDF and will be of particular importance to women and children. The concentration on the three priority areas will help ensure that larger parts of the Afghan population have: access to basic health services, attention paid to improving the nutrition status for children and women, prevention and not just the curing of illnesses, and not least help in building government capacity to sustain investment over time.

However, will the GOA have the necessary management and sufficient numbers of qualified staff to disband their collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on service delivery from 2020? This is a potential limitation that the European Commission is advised to take into consideration.

4.4.3 Policing and Rule of Law

The EU priority here is to continue its assistance in line with the EU high-level 2012 Chicago Conference commitment to support policing and the rule of law. The objectives are: 1) to enable the Afghan National Police to perform its tasks effectively and efficiently, specifically in its civilian policing mandate, and 2) to improve access to justice for all and ensure judicial integrity as well as independence through empowered, effective and transparent justice institutions.

As the MIP correctly observes (p. 14), '[t]his sector is subject to the highest risks among the proposed sectors', and it is allocated approximately 30 % of the financial resources.

Improving civilian policing and the rule of law is without doubt essential for the further development of a better functioning Afghan State, but these two sectors are struggling with a high degree of corruption and lack of sufficient trust from the population. It can, therefore, not be a case of 'business as usual' over the coming years; an active policy and diplomatic efforts are required to reform the sectors. This is, moreover, in line with the ANPDF's emphasis on reforming the public sector, rooting out corruption and not least reforming the justice sector. The EU will do well to maintain an eye on the introduction of women into both sectors, simultaneously with efforts to protect them against sexual harassment. The establishment of separate women's police units and attention to securing women's rights in the judicial system present opportunities, but the EU is also advised to pay attention to the informal legal system where many cases relating to family matters and women's entitlements are handled.

4.4.4 Democratisation and Accountability

The EU's priorities are in this case: 1) to increase parliamentary, media and social society scrutiny, and 2) to improve economic governance and reduce corruption. While interlinked, the first priority is to ensure that there is a system in place to hold the government accountable, while the second is to assist the government in improving their governance structures so as to be able to deliver on their plans and promises to their population (and their donors). The second objective is in line with the ANPDF priorities,

while the first can be seen as a requirement for the GOA to deliver on their plans and thereby strengthen its accountability towards the public.

Some caution is required though. There is ongoing discussion concerning changes to the democratic system, given the introduction of the Chief Executive position in the National Unity Government, and also the role of elected subnational entities. The present standoff between the Parliament and the GOA not only on the appointment but also the dismissal of Ministers is as such an indicator of a deeper crisis within the present democratic system. Whilst on the one hand this clearly requires sustained attention and dialogue, this can on the other hand easily be interpreted as interference in internal affairs. There is, therefore, a need for joint donor efforts to take this further, where the EU can be well positioned to assume a lead.

Reducing corruption is likewise a priority; much has been promised by the GOA – not least before the Brussels Conference – but it is less clear how they will organise their different anti-corruption bodies and if there is sufficient political willingness (or opportunity) to take high-profile cases to court. This is also an area for close dialogue with the GOA to identify areas for capacity development and joint engagement to reduce corruption, a major threat both to the implementation of the ANPDF and for accountability of the National Unity Government.

4.5 Afghan National Priority Programmes and the SMAF

There are four National Priority Programmes (see below) that help focus attention on key areas in the ANPDF and address major development challenges. This is then complemented by a Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF) with six key areas where detailed delivery plans are established.

I will first address the NPPs, their rationale and potential challenges.

4.5.1 The Citizens' Charter

The Citizens' Charter, as mentioned above, is an extension and broadening of the well-established and positively evaluated National Solidarity Programme (NSP), including its effect on gaining acceptance for women's role in local governance and inclusion in development programming. However, while the intention is to secure for the communities a broader set of services than rural development projects, the organisational model is more complicated with the introduction of e.g. education and health services as part of the package. This involves a larger number of Ministries in Kabul and their Departments in the provinces, whilst also posing larger challenges for coordination and prioritisation. Despite that, there is an opportunity for development of the CDCs, enabling them to take on a larger share of responsibility. The concern, following interviews in Kabul, is the lack of a clear and coherent plan on how to address coordination issues and clarify responsibilities among involved ministries. Likewise, how can the CDCs be systematically strengthened to take on their extended role. If done properly, this could address a number of the underlying challenges to Afghan development and peace – such as women's representation, corruption and local conflict management. However, bad organisation could make the situation worse. The EU is, therefore, strongly advised to follow closely the development of how the CC is organised and coordinated, and to provide advice where relevant.

4.5.2 Women's Economic Empowerment

It appears that Women's Economic Empowerment, however needed, is prioritised over securing the rights and influence of women and girls. It is notable that references to the Afghan National Action Plan (NAP) for the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2015) are not included in the ANPDF. The EU is, therefore, advised to maintain emphasis on the rights' dimension, not least on education, health and legal

rights, as it will be a requirement for women to participate fully on equal terms in economic empowerment (and gain from the derived benefits).

The plan is ambitious, and there are concerns about how to counter existing cultural constraints and what potential actually exists for the scaling up of activities.

4.5.3 Urban Development

This NPP is addressing a major concern relating to the increasingly high urbanisation rate Afghanistan has been faced with over the last decade; this is set to increase still further in future due to larger internal displacement and recent massive returns of Afghans from Pakistan. The majority of these are expected to try to establish themselves either in or close to major cities in order to access jobs, education for their children and health services. That in turn presents issues as regards the provision of services, the allocation of land and, not least, the development of infrastructure and sanitation solutions.

Accordingly, the challenges are not only to do with managing a planned urban development, but also countering the spontaneous and unplanned urban migration that is expected to be long-lasting as families gain a foothold in the cities.

It is, therefore, of importance that the capacity of municipalities and other local governance bodies are strengthened to meet the increased pressure and demand for services. Partnerships need also to be sought with NGOs and private businesses to determine how such assistance can be delivered. EU programming is not covering this sector, but nevertheless the EU is strongly advised to monitor potential challenges posed by large-scale urbanisation.

4.5.4 Comprehensive National and Agricultural Infrastructure

This is also a top priority area because of the vital need to enable agricultural development and ability for trade (and safe travel) throughout Afghanistan. It is, however, important to take the experience of the last 15 years into account, as there has been massive investment in building roads and infrastructure that are now subject to erosion due to the lack of maintenance and a clear understanding as to whether this is the responsibility of the donor, the GOA or the local communities benefitting from the support.

Any new initiatives need to clarify who holds responsibility for the maintenance of such investments, which ideally should be a partnership between the GOA and the citizens (preferably through the CDCs). Security is another concern, where many smaller projects with strong community involvement are more likely to succeed than larger and more visible ones – especially in more conflict-prone areas.

Success here will require thorough risk assessments and concrete plans for how local job opportunities can be maximised, investments maintained and (with reference to the NPP on Citizens Charter and Women Economic Empowerment) how this NPP can be integrated with and support the others – including the involvement of women in the decision-making process.

4.5.5 SMAFs

The SMAF (2015) is framed around 10 principles for mutual accountability, six selected areas (see below) that are accompanied with detailed indicators and an annex setting out a timeline for deliverables within 2016.

The areas are all highly relevant and they are: 1) Improving Security and Political Stability; 2) Anti-corruption, Governance, Rule of Law, and Human Rights; 3) Restoring Fiscal Sustainability & Integrity of Public Finance and Commercial Banking; 4) Reforming Development Planning and Management & Ensuring Citizen's Development Rights; 5) Private Sector Development and Inclusive Growth and Development and 6) Development Partnerships and Aid Effectiveness.

The indicators are detailed and very ambitious on deliverables, which is where the challenge emerges. It appears that only a few of the goals set in the indicators will be met within the set time frame of 2016. The EU and other donors are, therefore, advised to enter into a dialogue with the GOA to clarify the reasons why they have not been able to deliver, whether in regard to time the plan was too ambitious or whether the indicators also need to be changed. In the latter case discussions are needed to determine what new indicators and more realistic timeframes can be set. How can the revised SMAF then best be communicated to the various Ministries, Departments and Commissions to ensure broader knowledge, larger ownership and commitments in fulfilling the goals and timelines set? This will need to include a discussion on how to set and measure indicators for direct EU budget support.

4.6 Conclusions and recommendations

The above presentations and reflections lead to a set of conclusions and recommendations for the European Parliament, which can be transmitted to the Commission and their implementing partners:


- Acknowledge that contextual constraints will influence negatively the potential for implementation within the four EU prioritised areas, and consequently the outcomes/impact of suggested interventions. Accordingly, be analytical, conduct regular risks assessments, prepare risk mitigation initiatives, and be flexible in project implementation. Make systematic use of monitoring and evaluation to measure progress and identify unforeseen developments and possibly outcomes, draw upon these for internal and joint learning with the GOA and ensure it leads to agreed change in planning and programming.
- Efforts to secure a peace agreement are key to reducing conflict risks and 'everyday violence' that particularly affects women, but also a requirement to realise the potential for national and regional developments and trade that are the core of the ANPDF.
- Continued support for and dialogue on electoral and civil service reform processes is a requirement for sufficient government capacity/capability to implement development programmes.
- A rural priority and efforts to improve the rights and opportunities for women, including access to education and health, are required for ensuring the best possible impact from EU interventions. However, quality must be prioritised over quantity.
- Make use of Mid-Term Reviews to discuss and measure the four priority areas against contextual changes (such as security, migration and urbanisation) and government implementation capacity, modifying as required.
- Aid diplomacy is essential for dialogue with government on necessary solutions/reforms and for donor coherence, as laid out at the 2016 Brussel Conference. Make proper use of it.

Powerpoint Presentation

CMI CHR. MICHELSEN INSTITUTE

Afghanistan - Challenges and perspectives until 2020

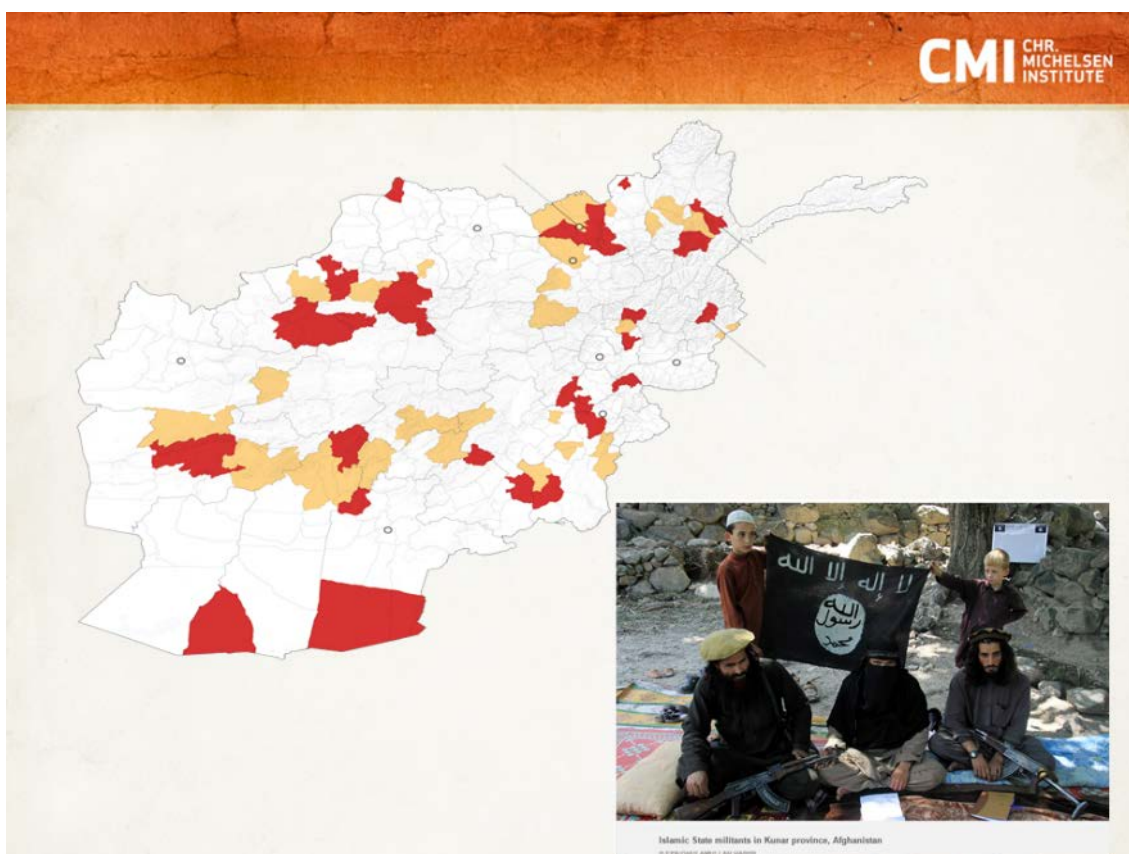
Arne Strand



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Main contextual challenges

- Continued **armed conflict** and insecurity limit access to areas and opportunity to implement (large scale) development projects and explore natural resources, and cause urbanization and outmigration
- **A weakened economy** and high level of corruption reduce government income potential and private sector's willingness to invest
- A **disunited** and at the same time highly centralised government hampers reform processes and ability/capacity to implement agreed development programmes, further constrained by fractured Parliament & civil society
- **Cultural/religious constraint** and low education levels (and quality) limit women's access to public participation and entrance to the workforce
- Internal warfare and **regional conflicts** hamper Afghanistan's ability to reach the ambition of being the "Heart of Asia" for trade and interaction



Afghan (2017 – 21) priorities supported by EU (2015-20)

Governance and State effectiveness

1) Reform of public sectors, 2) Rooting out corruption, 3) Strengthening Subnational Governance, 4) Countering Narcotics

Social Capital and Nation Building

1) Reform Justice Sector, 2) Build National Identity

Economic Growth and Job Creation

1) Agriculture 2) Private sector, 3) Minerals and Resources, 4) Energy and Infrastructure, 5) Regional integration, 5) Labour productivity, 6) Urban development

Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion

1) Citizens' Charter, 2) Women Empowerment 3) Social Protection

Agriculture and Rural Development

1) Food and nutrition security, 2) Rural livelihoods and employment, 3) Natural resources management, 4) Reduced dependency of income from poppy, 5) Build institutional capacity

Health


1) Expanded support to BPHS and EPHS, 2) Nutrition, 3) Strengthen government capacity

Policing and Rule of Law

Democratisation and Accountability


1) Increase parliamentary, media and social society scrutiny, 2) Improve economic governance and reduce corruption

Crosscutting: 1) Gender & HR, 2) Sust. economic growth, 3) Anti-corruption & counter narcotics



NPPs and SMAF

<p>Programmes</p> <p>Citizens Charter</p> <p>Ambitious and challenging to organise/coordinate</p> <p>Women Economic Empowerment</p> <p>Ambitious and questions regarding cultural constraints and scaling up potential</p> <p>Urban Development</p> <p>Highly needed, but IDPs/urbanisation add to challenges, question implementation capacity</p> <p>Comprehensive National and Agriculture Infrastructure</p> <p>Highly needed, security and long-term maintenance concern</p>	<p>Principles of Mutual Accountability</p> <p>Improving Security and Political Stability</p> <p>Anti-corruption, Governance, Rule of Law, and Human Rights</p> <p>Restoring Fiscal Sustainability & Integrity of Public Finance and Commercial Banking</p> <p>Reforming Development Planning and Management & Ensuring Citizens' Development Rights</p> <p>Private Sector Development and Inclusive Growth and Development</p> <p>Development Partnerships and Aid Effectiveness</p> <p>Detailed and ambitious on deliverables, GOA/ Donor dialogue important to secure progress</p>
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Recommendations

EU priority areas match and support the Afghan ANPDF, however :

- Acknowledge that contextual constraints will influence negatively the potential for implementation and outcomes/impact of suggested interventions, be analytic & flexible in project implementation (M&E&L&C)
- Efforts to secure a peace agreement is key to reduce conflict risks and “everyday violence”, open the potential for national and regional development and trade,
- Support for electoral and civil service reform processes a requirement for sufficient government capacity/capability to implement development programmes
- A rural priority and efforts to improve the rights and opportunities of women, including education – a requirement for impact, but, in all: QUALITY over QUANTITY
- Aid diplomacy essential for dialogue with government on necessary solutions/reforms and for donor coherence, make proper use of it



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¹ See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/>.

² See note 1.

³ The Brussels Conference had side events on women's empowerment and regional economic cooperation

⁴ See European Commission Press Release Database: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEX-16-3282_en.htm.

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