

Stabilisation of Afghanistan: challenges for the EU and the international community

European Parliament resolution of 8 July 2008 on stabilisation of Afghanistan: challenges for the EU and the international community (2007/2208(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its numerous previous resolutions on Afghanistan and, most recently, to its resolution of 18 January 2006¹,
- having regard to the Afghanistan Compact agreed on at the London Conference on 1 February 2006 and to the recognition by the Afghan Government and the international community that the success of the Compact requires strong political, security and financial commitment to achieve the benchmarks within the agreed timelines, with the success of the Compact relying on an effective coordination and monitoring mechanism,
- having regard to the Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, published at the NATO summit in Bucharest on 3 April 2008,
- having regard to the reports by the Secretary General of the UN, submitted on 21 September 2007 and 6 March 2008, on 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security',
- having regard to the results of the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan, held in Paris on 12 June 2008,
- having regard to the Government of Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy launched at the above-mentioned London Conference,
- having regard to its recommendation to the Council of 25 October 2007 on production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan²,
- having regard to all the relevant Council conclusions, and in particular the GAERC conclusions of 10 March 2008, 29 April 2008 and 26-27 May 2008,
- having regard to Council Joint Action 2007/369/CFSP of 30 May 2007 on the establishment of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL AFGHANISTAN)³ and Council Joint Action 2007/733/CFSP of 13 November 2007 amending Joint Action 2007/369/CFSP⁴,

¹ OJ C 287 E, 24.11.2006, p. 176.

² Texts adopted, P6_TA(2007)0485.

³ OJ L 139, 31.5.2007, p. 33.

⁴ OJ L 295, 14.11.2007, p. 31.

- having regard to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2008¹,
 - having regard to the Commission's National Indicative Programme, earmarking EUR 600 million for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the budget years 2007-2010,
 - having regard to the visit of the delegation from the lower house of the Afghan Parliament (Wolesi Jirga) to the European Parliament on 26-30 November 2007,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Development (A6-0269/2008),
- A. whereas Afghanistan is at a crossroads, as evidenced by the rise in terrorist acts and violent insurgency, a seriously deteriorating security situation, increased opium production and growing popular discontent over corruption and government failures; whereas, despite the efforts of the international community and the partial success as regards civil reconstruction, the living conditions of considerable sections of the Afghan population have not improved; whereas the current threat Afghanistan is facing requires short-term action but long-term solutions will only come about through comprehensive improvements in governance and the emergence of a stronger state,
- B. whereas the United States – with support from the United Kingdom – began ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ on 7 October 2001; whereas four other EU Member States – the Czech Republic, France, Poland and Romania – are among the coalition forces participating in the operation; whereas apart from Cyprus and Malta all EU Member States contribute a total of more than 21 500 troops to the NATO-led ISAF mission; whereas the first provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) started in late 2001 and there are currently approximately 25 PRTs operating in the entire country,
- C. whereas there is a considerable discrepancy between the amount of money the international community is spending on military operations, on the one hand, and on civil reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, on the other,
- D. whereas more than half of the inhabitants of Afghanistan are living below the poverty line and the country's economy is one of the weakest in the world, with unemployment reaching 40%,
- E. whereas Afghanistan's health care sector has started to produce the first promising results, such as a 24% decline in the infant mortality rate since the fall of the Taliban, a higher number of babies living beyond their first birthday and a higher percentage of Afghans with direct access to primary health care,
- F. whereas Afghanistan's educational system is showing the first signs of positive developments, such as an increasing number of children and particularly girls, students and teachers who have returned to school, the ongoing rehabilitation of primary schools and training for teachers,
- G. whereas, although there are no official figures on civilian deaths in Afghanistan, the UN

¹ OJ L 71, 14.3.2008.

Secretary-General's report of 6 March 2008 on the situation in Afghanistan points out that 'in 2007 the level of insurgent and terrorist activity increased sharply from that of the previous year. An average of 566 incidents per month was recorded in 2007, compared to 425 per month in the previous year. Of the over 8,000 conflict-related fatalities in 2007, over 1,500 were civilians' – the highest casualty figure since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001,

- H. whereas the new Afghan Constitution does not guarantee full religious freedom, since abandoning Islam remains a punishable offence,
- I. whereas the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board for Afghanistan meeting on 5-6 February 2008 in Tokyo began to prepare an international conference to review progress in the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact adopted by the above-mentioned London Conference,
- J. whereas the 2008 Afghanistan Opium Winter Rapid Assessment Survey (carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)) confirms the trends of the 2007 survey, according to which the number of opium-free provinces in the north and centre might grow but the level of cultivation in the south and west is likely to increase; whereas the 2007 report on the one hand repeats the misconception that provinces with little or no poppy cultivation are 'opium-free' but emphasises on the other hand the link between insecurity and narcotics production; whereas the core tools of a counter-narcotics policy are crop eradication, interdiction (which is much more complex than arresting traffickers), and development (alternative livelihoods) pursued simultaneously,
- K. whereas under the US secret detention programme hundreds of Afghan prisoners remain detained in various prison facilities, such as the Bagram military base and Guantánamo, in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law; whereas prisoners in Afghan custody continue to be faced with a law enforcement system that lacks the minimum standards of the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights,
 - 1. Takes the view that as a result of the last 30 years of Afghan history, characterised by Soviet occupation, the fighting between various Mujahideen factions and repression under the Taliban regime, the country has started an important and complicated reconstruction of its society and must continue to strengthen its institutions and to provide better for the basic needs of its citizens in such areas as education, housing, health, nutrition and public safety; welcomes the efforts and progress made since 2002 by the Afghan people towards establishing the rule of law and democracy and the search for stability;
 - 2. Is convinced that the country has become a test case for international development assistance and bi- and multilateral cooperation; stresses the need for the international community to continue to work with the Afghan Government and the people of Afghanistan in order to demonstrate its ability to end the vicious circle of violence and poverty and to give the country the prospect of sustainable peace and development; calls on the Council and the Commission to bring forward an initiative for an international council comprising the main donors and UN organisations, possibly led by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and based on the concept of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, in order to harmonise the different reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan;
 - 3. Draws attention to the lasting effects of the wars that have taken place in the country, the millions of victims, the disabled, refugees and displaced persons and the material costs

resulting from the destruction of almost all the main infrastructure;

4. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul on 7 July 2008, which caused more than 40 deaths, including those of four members of Embassy staff; expresses its sincerest sympathy for the relatives, the wounded and the Afghan and Indian Governments;
5. Considers that the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship has been the source of much of the region's instability, and therefore concludes that stabilising the region requires a comprehensive policy geared to that relationship; hopes that, with the new government in Pakistan, the improvement of the bilateral relationship will receive a fresh impetus; believes, however, that without the active engagement and assistance of the international community, the two countries will not be able to extricate themselves from their difficult bilateral relationship; recognises that security in Afghanistan hinges to a very large extent on the democratisation of Pakistan; urges the international community to initiate and support measures to lessen tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, including a long-term programme to stabilise and develop the cross-border region involving stakeholders on both sides;
6. Welcomes the efforts and progress made since 2002 by the Afghan people and institutions towards establishing the rule of law and democracy and the search for stability; considers these achievements to be extremely important with regard to the structural problems of a lack of legality and respect for human dignity that characterised Afghanistan under the Soviet regime and the Taliban;
7. Considers, in particular, that the massive turnout at the country's various elections attests to the desire of the women and men of Afghanistan to help establish a country based on the principles of active and participatory democracy; stresses that these elections have provided an example in the regional context and for developing countries experiencing serious armed conflicts;
8. Stresses the need for Afghanistan's institutions to continue to fight against all forms of corruption and to put in place effective policies to improve social conditions for the population;
9. Notes that in Afghanistan the EU is primarily known as a humanitarian organisation, but considers that there is also a need for the EU to be seen as having a stronger political influence and therefore calls on the Commission to propose strategies whereby, mindful of the natural sovereignty of the Afghan people, the EU might strengthen its visibility when empowering the civil, political and bureaucratic apparatus, until the governmental infrastructure has advanced into an era of greater stability and permanence;
10. Stresses the need for the international community to better coordinate its efforts to provide efficient and sustainable civilian aid; therefore also calls for a balanced budget allocating sufficient funds for civil reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, inasmuch as the creation of security and respect for the rule of law are matters of core importance;
11. Welcomes the fact that the above-mentioned International Conference of 12 June 2008 not only saw pledges of a further USD 21 billion but also reviewed the procedures needed to make international aid more effectively and precisely oriented towards priorities and to prevent corruption;

12. Emphasises that a major strengthening of political will and commitment is necessary, and that this should be followed up not only by a willingness to provide additional combat troops in the most difficult areas, unrestricted by national caveats, but also by urgent and intensified civil reconstruction efforts, in order to consolidate achievements and restore the confidence of the Afghan population on a long-term and sustainable basis; considers in particular that ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ could be perceived as counterproductive if the military pressure on the insurgents is not matched by a strengthened political process through which the Afghan authorities reach out to all segments of the population that recognise the Constitution and lay down their weapons; in this regard, also notes that the humanitarian community – comprising the UN and non-governmental organisations – needs to enhance coordination, avoid ad hoc initiatives and develop preparedness and contingency planning;
13. Stresses that European Union should use the experience and expertise of its missions and of those Member States that already have a military or civilian presence on Afghanistan territory, in the process of the stabilisation and reconstruction of Afghanistan;
14. Supports the efforts of NATO forces to improve security in the country and tackle local and international terrorism, and considers the presence of these forces to be essential in order to ensure the country’s future;
15. Urges the EU and its Member States to support the efforts to combat terrorism, religious extremism, ethnic extremism, ethnic separatism and all actions aimed at subverting the territorial integrity, state unity and national sovereignty of Afghanistan;
16. Draws attention to the idea that the EU and its Member States should support Afghanistan in the construction of its own state, with stronger democratic institutions capable of ensuring national sovereignty, state unity, territorial integrity, sustainable economic development and the prosperity of the people of Afghanistan, and respecting the historical, religious, spiritual and cultural traditions of all ethnic and religious communities situated on Afghan territory;
17. Notes that redevelopment needs are important throughout Afghanistan, but that aid distribution and security pose particular problems in the Pashtun-dominated area, and therefore calls for the reconstruction activities in southern Afghanistan to be speeded up;
18. Draws attention to the fact that the EU should encourage and help European investors to be involved in rebuilding Afghanistan, to be present on the ground and to develop businesses there;
19. Points out that the main problems facing the country are restoring security and establishing a functioning state; notes that Afghanistan's security problems are more complex than just a war on terror and that they therefore require more than a military solution; points out that security and the rule of law are interdependent, which in turn creates an atmosphere conducive to human development, and that strengthening the rule of law is necessary in order to enable the country's citizens to make economic and social choices that will allow them to live meaningful and healthy lives, when supplemented by measures aimed at restoring a functioning state in order to protect the rule of law, secure access to basic public services and ensure equal opportunities for its people;
20. Welcomes the commitment expressed in the Afghanistan Compact ‘to work towards a

stable and prosperous Afghanistan, with good governance and human rights protection for all under the rule of law'; takes the view that in the absence of clear priorities or sequencing the Compact should have defined guidelines on how to achieve these ambitious goals, and stresses, therefore, the need for donors to ensure that their programmes are aligned with such priorities at the central and provincial levels and that the resources allocated are appropriate and effectively disbursed;

21. Stresses the urgent need to develop a balanced and sustainable approach to security sector reform, providing for a professional national army and police force; stresses that the Afghan judicial system is in dire need of investment and that there is an urgent need to focus on upgrading its capacity and capability;
22. Draws attention to the fact that, despite some achievements to date, the overall outcome of police reform efforts during the past five years has been disappointing, demonstrating the serious difficulties facing the international community on the ground when it comes to institution building; urges the international community in general, and the EU police mission in particular, to continue their efforts to develop Afghanistan's own police force, characterised by respect for human rights and the rule of law;
23. Draws attention to the fact that the EUPOL mandate provides for tasks to 'support linkages between the police and the wider rule of law', and therefore calls on the Council and the Commission to continue to closely coordinate their respective activities in order to ensure that the EU's policies are more coherent and efficient; considers it equally important for the EU to increase considerably the resources envisaged for EUPOL, in terms of both personnel and financing; highlights the fact that a comprehensive reform of the Afghan Ministry of Interior is indispensable and that this is first and foremost a political task and to a lesser extent a technical problem, inasmuch as, without it, the police reform efforts will fail, and therefore attaches great importance to another aim of EUPOL, namely to 'monitor, mentor, advise and train at the level of the Afghan Ministry of Interior, regions and provinces'; expresses its support for the EUR 2.5 million programme under the Stability Instrument¹ concerning measures to reform the appointment of judges and prosecutors, and expects that this pilot scheme will serve to develop a substantial long-term justice sector reform programme for 2009;
24. Draws attention to the fact that the EUPOL mission has yet to reach full strength more than a year after being launched on 15 June 2007, and notes that even when fully deployed it will consist of only 195 personnel supervising high-level decisions in Kabul and provincial centres; takes account of the recent statement by the Afghan Foreign Minister that at least 700 extra trainers are urgently needed in the country, and of the contribution this shortage has made to a situation in which mortality rates are significantly higher for the police than the army; points out that the German government has offered to increase its own contribution from 60 to 120 trainers if similar commitments are given by other EU countries; calls for greater coordination between EU and US efforts in relation to the training of the Afghan civil police;
25. Calls on the Council and the Commission to commit themselves, in the context of the programme of assistance for Afghanistan, to reform of the legal system, with the aim of professionalising the Afghan judiciary through its main institutions, concentrating on the

¹ Regulation (EC) No 1717/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an Instrument for Stability (OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 1).

Supreme Court, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Justice, with the aim of safeguarding defendants' rights, providing the necessary legal aid to vulnerable groups, and guaranteeing the rights of the defence; calls for compliance with UN General Assembly resolution 62/149 of 18 December 2007 on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty to be one of the priorities of European efforts to reform the justice system in Afghanistan;

26. Strongly believes that the PRTs should concentrate on specific objectives related to security, training and working with the Afghan police and military, and supporting the reach of the central government into insecure areas; stresses the need to redefine the role of the PRTs, particularly as regards the coordination and exchange of best practices between them; is convinced that, although security and development are interdependent in Afghanistan, there is a clear demarcation between military and humanitarian action that should be maintained, and that security and development professionals should therefore play to their strengths and their professional expertise; believes that the numbers of Afghans working in PRTs should be boosted and that local ownership should be enhanced as much as possible;
27. Strongly supports the view that there is an urgent need to develop and strengthen the nascent civil society in Afghanistan, and that a great deal of time and effort will be required in order to develop gradually a broad awareness of the importance of human rights, democracy and fundamental freedoms, and in particular gender equality, education and the protection of minorities; stresses that a strong civil society can only develop in a political environment that is characterised by stable and efficient institutions and well-organised political parties; considers that, in order to overcome the culture of violence prevailing in Afghan society, the international donor community should lend financial and technical support to local projects aimed at reconciliation; believes that the European Union must play an increasing role in supporting Afghan civil society; underlines the need for the Afghan Parliament and civil society to be fully involved in the programming of EU development cooperation, and particularly in the drafting of Country Strategy Papers and Annual Action Plans;
28. Believes that the strengthening of Afghan civil society will only be successful if all ethnic and religious groups are represented and heard, which also includes cooperation with traditional tribal leaders (as already practised in the so-called 'Tribal Liaison Offices');
29. Emphasises that media freedom is essential in creating a democratic society; is very concerned about the rising number of attacks on journalists, and calls on the Afghan authorities to seriously investigate these violations; welcomes the work of the independent media in Afghanistan, which have re-established a core of information pluralism in the country after decades in which all freedom of expression was absent; considers freedom of the press and freedom of expression to be essential conditions for the country's social development and for relations between Afghanistan and the European Union; expresses its concern about President Karzai's refusal to sign the draft media law on 15 December 2007 following its approval in the two houses of parliament; calls on the President to clarify the status of the draft media law and recalls the government's commitment in the Afghanistan Compact to develop 'independent and pluralistic' media; expresses its concern at the state of freedom of expression, jeopardised by the sentencing of independent journalists and bloggers, and calls on the Afghan Government to undertake to guarantee effective freedom of speech for all its citizens, starting with the defence of Internet freedom;
30. Emphasises the importance of a forward-looking mass media law for the development of a

more inclusive, tolerant and democratic society that is mindful of the country's religious and cultural values without curtailing the activities and independence of the media on the pretext of national security or religion and culture;

31. Expresses its concern for the physical integrity of Ms Malalai Joya, Member of the Wolesi Jirga, and calls on the Afghan authorities to guarantee her protection; calls on the Afghan authorities to release Latif Pedram, founder of the National Congress Party of Afghanistan, from his house arrest, to dismiss the charges against him and to give assurances about his security;
32. Reiterates its call on the Afghan authorities to introduce the moratorium on the death penalty; expresses its utmost concern for the life of Perwiz Kambakhsh and dozens of other individuals who are facing the death penalty in a judicial system which is not yet able to ensure a fair trial, and calls on President Karzai to commute their sentences;
33. Welcomes Afghanistan's progress in improving women's political representation; expresses its solidarity with all women in the country who are struggling to defend and promote their rights; remains concerned about the huge income disparities between men and women, the very low literacy rate of women, the injustices – induced by cultural practices – suffered by women and girls, both in the denial by family members and communities of access for women to basic services such as health care and education and in the lack of employment opportunities, as well as high levels of domestic violence and discrimination; stresses the urgent need for measures aimed at protecting the rights of women to be built into legal and political reform; calls on the Council and the Commission to lend active support to such an initiative and to earmark funds for measures such as active steps to increase the enrolment of girls in schools and the recruitment of female teachers, which will help build the country's capacity to protect the rights of women, girls and children, since the latter are also victims of domestic violence, sexual exploitation induced by cultural practices and exploitative labour and trafficking; calls, further, for specific measures to address the problems facing Afghan women in the sectors of health and education;
34. Draws attention to the fact that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has helped 3,69 million Afghan refugees to return to Afghanistan since March 2002, marking the largest assisted return operation in its history, but that, despite these returns, approximately 3,5 million registered and unregistered Afghans still remain in Pakistan and Iran; is concerned about the decline in funding for Afghan refugees, and underlines that maintaining a successful repatriation programme is likely to become more expensive, as the refugees remaining in Pakistan and Iran have less in the way of resources and weaker ties to Afghanistan than those who returned earlier; stresses that the safe and voluntary return of Afghan refugees and displaced persons should remain a high priority for Afghanistan and the international community; calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase funding for refugee reintegration;
35. Expresses its deep concern about the ever-expanding cultivation and trafficking of opium, which has serious political and national security implications in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries; stresses that the opium economy continues to be a source of corruption and undermines public institutions, particularly those in the security and justice sectors; since there is no obvious 'quick fix' solution, and since repressive measures aimed at crop eradication cannot on their own yield the expected results, calls on the international community led by the Afghan government to develop a long-term strategy aimed primarily

at comprehensive rural development, including the establishment of the necessary infrastructure and functioning administrative institutions; welcomes the increased dialogue between Afghanistan, Iran and the international community on ways to curtail opium production and exports;

36. Calls on the US Government to abandon its crop eradication policy and notably the use of 'Roundup' for aerial sprayings, a substance which is associated with serious environmental and health hazards, inasmuch as targeting poppy farmers will only fuel resentment against the international troop presence;
37. Is concerned about the major social and health problems caused by drug addiction in general, and the social and economic consequences for addicted Afghan women in particular; refers to a UNODC survey of 2005 according to which there were 920 000 drug users in Afghanistan, of which 120 000 were women; highlights the statement contained in the survey that, instead of viewing drug addiction as a social problem, Afghan society views it as an individual problem, and many women use drugs for medical purposes to alleviate and remedy a range of physical and psychological problems; notes that, although severe punishments are prescribed for growing, smuggling and using drugs, the government of Afghanistan is currently unable to enforce the laws in that regard; urges the Afghan government and the international community to devise, finance and implement appropriate programmes, activities and awareness-raising campaigns targeting addicted women and their families;
38. Supports the Commission's efforts to help Afghanistan and calls on the Commission to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of European Union financial assistance, in particular the Commission's contribution to the Trust Funds, in order to achieve greater transparency; urges the Commission to keep Parliament adequately informed about the results of such evaluation;
39. Recalls the European Parliament's initiative, under its 2008 budget, to support democracy-building with parliaments in third countries, and resolves to make use of it for capacity-building and technical assistance aimed at improving the ability of the Afghan Parliament to legislate and to monitor the executive branch, especially by upholding the rule of law and respect for human rights, and women's rights in particular;
40. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Secretary General of NATO, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.