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TEXTS ADOPTED

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**P8\_TA(2017)0499**

**Situation in Afghanistan**

**European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2017 on the situation in Afghanistan (2017/2932(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the results of the Brussels International Conference on Afghanistan of 5 October 2016 co-chaired by the European Union,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on Afghanistan, in particular those of 26 November 2015 on the situation in Afghanistan, in particular the killings in the province of Zabol<sup>1</sup> and of 13 June 2013 on the negotiations on an EU-Afghanistan cooperation agreement on partnership and development<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Council conclusions on Afghanistan of 16 October 2017,
- having regard to the statement made by the UN Security Council President on 14 September 2016 on the situation in Afghanistan,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 2210 (2015), UN Security Council Resolution 2344 (2017) and to the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA),
- having regard to the joint communication of 24 July 2017 from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council on ‘Elements for an EU Strategy on Afghanistan’ (JOIN(2017)0031),
- having regard to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report of 13 February 2017 entitled ‘Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Return of Afghan Refugees’,
- having regard to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction’s (SIGAR) Quarterly Report to the United States Congress of 30 January 2017,
- having regard to the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward (JWF) on migration issues signed on 3 October 2016,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 366, 27.10.2017, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 65, 19.2.2016, p. 133.

- having regard to the EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development signed on 18 February 2017,
  - having regard to the UN report on the Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees in Afghanistan of April 2017,
  - having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the European Union and its Member States have been working with Afghanistan and the wider international community since 2001 to combat terrorism and extremism, while also striving to achieve sustainable peace and development; whereas, on account of increasing insurgent and terrorist pressure, a struggling economy and instability in the political sphere, these goals and the substantial progress which has been achieved are at risk;
  - B. whereas the EU and its Member States have contributed billions of euros in humanitarian and developmental aid and assistance to Afghanistan since 2002; whereas the EU is Afghanistan's largest development cooperation partner and is expected to provide up to EUR 5 billion of the total EUR 13,6 billion pledged to Afghanistan for the period 2017-2020 during the Brussels International Conference on Afghanistan in October 2016;
  - C. whereas ensuring democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance throughout the transition in Afghanistan and into its decade of transformation (2015-2024) are essential to establishing a stable and prosperous state;
  - D. whereas major increases in the standard of living have occurred over the past 15 years since 2001, as access to basic healthcare and education and the empowerment of women have increased GDP per capita fivefold and average life expectancy by 15 years; whereas, according to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), since the collapse of the Taliban in 2001, attendance at general schools had risen from one million students, most of whom were boys, to almost nine million by 2015, with female students accounting for an estimated 39 % of the total;
  - E. whereas on 24 July 2017 the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy published a Joint Communication on an EU Strategy on Afghanistan; whereas the EU's four priority areas critical to achieving progress in Afghanistan concern: (a) promoting peace, stability and regional security; (b) reinforcing democracy, the rule of law and human rights and promoting good governance and women's empowerment; (c) supporting economic and human development; (d) addressing challenges related to migration;
  - F. whereas, following the 2014 presidential election crisis, the National Unity Government (NUG) has experienced stalled progress on its reform agenda, resulting in an increasingly unstable political situation; whereas the unemployment rate in Afghanistan is 39 % and over 39 % of the population live in poverty;
  - G. whereas widespread corruption, entrenched patronage systems and the inability of the politically fractured Afghan Government to move forward on reforms threaten to reduce progress or reverse past achievements;
  - H. whereas the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which was

established in 2002, supports the Afghan Government in its efforts to achieve peace, the protection of human rights and good governance; whereas its mandate is renewed annually by the UN Security Council and was most recently unanimously extended to 2018;

- I. whereas, although some socio-economic and political gains have been made in recent years, a resurgent Taliban, Al-Qaeda and a newly emerged Islamic State (IS) presence in Afghanistan, such as the emerging local franchise in Afghanistan (Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP)), all threaten to turn instability into larger-scale conflict; whereas the recent report by the UNAMA has documented the highest number of casualties since 2009, with 11 318 civilian casualties in 2016, while from January 2017 to September 2017 casualties already amounted to 8 019; whereas this has also led to increased migration to Europe;
- J. whereas, under the new US strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia, an additional 4 000 soldiers will join the existing US contingent of 8 400 soldiers; whereas the new US strategy demands that Pakistan stop harbouring and supporting terrorists and calls for greater involvement by the Republic of India in helping to stabilise the region; whereas the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission will increase its current troop level from 13 000 to 16 000; whereas the new US strategy will be developed favouring a conditions-based approach according to which diplomatic and economic agreements will be integrated within the framework of the military effort;
- K. whereas Afghanistan is facing an unprecedented increase in returns of documented and undocumented Afghan nationals, mainly from Pakistan; whereas around two million undocumented Afghans and one million Afghans with refugee status are living in Iran and returning to Afghanistan; whereas according to the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), there are more than 1,8 million IDPs in Afghanistan as a result of the conflict, with a record 650 000 people fleeing to other areas of the country in search of safety in 2016, representing an average of 1 500 per day; whereas in the second half of 2016 there was a 10-year high surge in the number of Afghan refugees returning from Pakistan, rising to 370 000 from 55 000 in 2015;
- L. whereas the Republic of India is the largest regional donor to Afghanistan, providing some USD 3 billion in assistance since the Taliban Government was ousted in 2001; whereas this assistance has funded, among other things, the building of more than 200 schools in Afghanistan, over 1 000 scholarships for Afghan students, and the possibility for roughly 16 000 Afghans to study in India; whereas India has also provided assistance in the construction of critical infrastructure, such as around 4 000 km of roadways in Afghanistan, most notably the Zaranj-Dilaram highway, the Salma dam and electricity transmission lines, and the Afghan parliament building;
- M. whereas instability in Afghanistan has negative economic and security repercussions for Iran and the wider region as a whole; whereas Afghanistan's economy is highly dependent on poppy production, which has increased significantly in recent years, resulting in a spike in drug use in neighbouring Iran; whereas this illicit drug trade is used by the Taliban to fund its operations; whereas limiting this trade and finding economic alternatives to it would be mutually advantageous for Iran and Afghanistan; whereas opium from Afghanistan is the main source of heroin in the EU; whereas working with Iran and other border countries such as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and

Uzbekistan is necessary to further limit the flow of opiates to Russian and European markets;

- N. whereas a new infrastructure dimension is pivotal for the future of Afghanistan in order to enable an entirely new reality of economic and social opportunities for one of the poorest countries in the world; whereas a new national infrastructure development programme will attract positive and growing regional investment within the framework of the new Silk Road;
- O. whereas reports indicate that Afghanistan has between one and three trillion dollars of undeveloped mineral reserves; whereas illicit mining is a major problem that threatens to turn a potential driver of Afghan development into a source of conflict and instability; whereas mining is the Taliban's second largest source of revenue;
1. Recognises that, despite substantial international efforts over a long period of time, Afghanistan is still facing a serious conflict which is hampering its economic and social development substantially; recalls that Afghanistan has been torn apart by nearly 40 years of conflict and war; reiterates the European Union's goals of promoting peace, stability and regional security, strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights, promoting good governance and women's empowerment, supporting economic and human development, and addressing challenges related to migration;
  2. Recalls that Afghanistan in the last decade and a half has achieved progress in the political, security, economic and development spheres; highlights that the GDP per capita has increased fivefold, life expectancy has increased by almost 15 years, and there has been a significant increase in the number of girls attending schools in comparison to 2001, the figure today being some 40 % of the total of 8 to 9 million children; stresses that none of the above would have been possible but for the dedication of the Afghan population and the commitment of the international community, and the provision of funds, know-how and personnel on the ground; underlines that the progress achieved is very fragile and reversible; emphasises that advancing it will require further reforms to take place, stable relations with neighbours and the continued provision of a necessary level of security and stability;
  3. Recognises the efforts and pays tribute to the sacrifices of the international community which provided security to Afghanistan for over a decade through Operation Enduring Freedom and the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, during which nearly 3 500 servicemen and women died; welcomes the 39-nation NATO-led Resolute Support Mission operating since 1 January 2015, which is mandated to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions; commends the great sacrifice of the ANSF, which endure heavy losses on an annual basis in their fight against insurgents; recalls the international community's annual contribution of approximately USD 1 billion to sustain the ANSF's financing until 2020;
  4. Welcomes the commitment of the Afghan Government to pursuing a national strategy focused on a political, social, economic and safe environment that will allow for a peaceful, secure and sustainable Afghanistan, as outlined in the conclusions of the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in Brussels on 5 October 2016; calls for the post of Prime Minister to be enshrined in the Afghan Constitution in order to enable greater political stability in Afghanistan; calls on the Afghan Government to ensure a transparent electoral process in 2018; calls on Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to match

his strong public commitments to the protection of rights and freedoms with swift and robust implementation of legislation to protect them;

5. Stresses that an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is the only way forward, unreservedly integrating the whole of civil society and all parties to the conflict; reminds the Afghan Government that in order to permit development and promote peace and stability, political infighting must cease; calls for the EU to actively support an Afghan-led disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme for former insurgents;
6. Underscores the importance of Afghanistan for regional stability; emphasises that a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan is vital for peace and stability in the region as a whole; reiterates, in this context, the importance of regional partners, such as the countries of Central Asia, Iran, China, India and Pakistan; encourages them to cooperate constructively to promote a genuine and results-oriented negotiation process without preconditions; takes note of the activities of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) on Afghanistan comprising the US, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as established in December 2015;
7. Expresses extreme concern that, despite the political agreement following the 2014 presidential elections, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated and the number of terrorist attacks has multiplied; is alarmed by the Taliban's ongoing territorial expansion and the recent strengthening of IS and Al-Qaeda terrorist groups; points out that, according to the US SIGAR, 6 785 members of the Afghan forces were killed and another 11 777 wounded from January to November 2016, and that the UNAMA also reported a 3 % increase in civilian casualties (3 498 killed, 7 920 wounded) in 2016 compared with the previous year; regrets the deteriorating security situation that is allowing criminal groups to kidnap both Afghan nationals and foreign citizens, including humanitarian and aid workers;
8. Expresses strong concern about the emergence of the Islamic State as the latest element to contribute to the increasing fragility of the security landscape in Afghanistan; underlines that in addition to its stronghold in the east of the country (Nangarhar) it is attempting to assert its presence in the north of the country with the assistance of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU); highlights that, should this be successful, an environment conducive to the harbouring of foreign fighters and militants will be created, as they are pushed out of Iraq and Syria on account of IS military setbacks in those two countries;
9. Underscores the importance of a genuine internal reconciliation process; underscores the need to fight radicalisation, extremism and recruitment for terrorist organisations; underlines that combating terrorism and its financing is a key ingredient of creating an environment conducive to security in Afghanistan;
10. Warns that the poor capabilities of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) and National Police Force remain one of the most critical issues compromising Afghanistan's security and reconstruction; welcomes the continued EU focus on the enhancement of the role and rights of Afghan women and recognises the need to train female police officers; welcomes the Republic of India's commitment to assisting Afghanistan with the provision of defence hardware to the Afghan military in December 2015 and the military training of thousands of Afghan security personnel,

which significantly helped to enhance its military capability, in accordance with the objective of NATO-led mission 'Resolute Support' to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions, launched in January 2015; is encouraged by the work carried out and cooperation by the Republic of India and Afghanistan on infrastructure projects and humanitarian support;

11. Believes that the fight against corruption within the Afghan governmental institutions must be a permanent core priority on account of all the negative direct impacts of corruption on the quality of governance in the country; calls on the Government of Afghanistan to increase political inclusiveness, strengthen accountability and actively combat the culture of corruption and nepotism; welcomes notably, in this respect, the establishment of the Anti-corruption Justice Centre in June 2016; notes, in addition, the UNAMA's call for continued support and assistance from the international community for the Afghan Government's anti-corruption efforts;
12. Calls on the Government of Afghanistan and its regional partners, in particular Iran, to fight against illicit drug trafficking and illicit mining and coordinate with one another to eliminate these illegal practices, which are detrimental to the stability of the region; reminds all parties that these are the main sources of funding for terrorist organisations in the region; recognises that any further mining development must be sustainable and beneficial to the general population, in accordance with international standards; condemns the repression, illicit drug trafficking, land grabbing, unlawful confiscation and extortion carried out by warlords; recalls that the production and trafficking of opium in Afghanistan has devastating consequences on the local population and the overall security of the country;
13. Welcomes Afghan membership of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative; urges the Afghan Government to increase transparency in the mining sector and to establish robust requirements for licences and monitoring in order to ensure a sustainable extractive industry; urges the Government to step up efforts to protect vital public resources such as land and minerals from exploitation by criminal and insurgent networks;
14. Stands with the people of Afghanistan and insists that all parties involved in the conflict adhere to international humanitarian law and respect the rights of all members of society, in particular minorities, women and children, who are disproportionately affected by the situation; urges the Afghan authorities to fully enforce the UN-Afghan action plan signed in Kabul on 30 January 2011 regarding the practice of 'bacha bazi' and enabling the rehabilitation of child victims of sexual abuse; condemns the attacks on hospitals and health clinics, schools and humanitarian operations; condemns in the strongest terms the continued disregard for human rights and the barbaric violence carried out by the Taliban, IS and Al-Qaeda against the people of Afghanistan; draws attention to the risk associated with the return of former war criminals, notably Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the founder of Hizb-e-Islami, who was designated a terrorist by the US in 2003 and has been associated with the increased presence of IS in Afghanistan;
15. Is alarmed by the increasing resurgence of violence against women and the obliteration of women's rights and living conditions within areas controlled by the Taliban in Afghanistan; repeats its call on the Afghan Parliament and the Afghan Government to revoke all laws that contain elements of discrimination against women, which are in

breach of the international treaties signed by Afghanistan; welcomes the focus on women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in EU assistance to Afghanistan, in particular the fact that 53 % of EU programmes have gender equality as a significant objective; fully supports full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and other domestic measures to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Afghanistan, as well as to tackle violence against women;

16. Calls on the governments of regional partners such as the countries of Central Asia, Iran, India, Russia and Pakistan to work together to pursue a peace settlement in Afghanistan, continuous socio-economic development and increased domestic stability, as well as cooperation on security and terror issues, and encourages intelligence sharing and cooperation to fight terrorists and extremists on both sides of the border; urges all Afghan regional actors to commit unreservedly to pursuing transparent engagement in the fight against terrorism;
17. Reiterates the need for the international community to continue its engagement in Afghanistan and to contribute to rebuilding the country, developing the economy and resisting terrorism; welcomes the financial engagements confirmed by the EU and the Member States at the Brussels Conference; calls notably for support for initiatives that address the priority needs of internally displaced and returning refugees;
18. Recognises the responsibilities of the EU and its Member States to respect the right to seek international protection and to participate in UNHCR resettlement programmes; stresses the right and ability to seek refuge in safe and legal ways as critical for preventing deaths among asylum seekers;
19. Notes the conclusion of the Joint Way Forward informal readmission agreement between the EU and Afghanistan; regrets the lack of parliamentary oversight and democratic control on the conclusion of this agreement; calls on governments in the region to refrain from the repatriation of Afghans; points out that this is a direct violation of international humanitarian law and that the increasing number of refugees being treated this way only lends strength to terrorist groups and creates more instability in the region; underlines that repatriations to Afghanistan put the lives of returnees at grave risk, in particular those of single persons without a network of family or friends in Afghanistan who stand little chance of survival; underlines that EU assistance and cooperation must be tailored to achieving development and growth in third countries and to reducing and eventually eradicating poverty, and not to incentivising third countries to cooperate on readmission of irregular migrants, to forcibly deterring people from moving, or to stopping flows to Europe (Parliament's resolution of 5 April 2017 on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action<sup>1</sup>);
20. Takes note of the decision of the ICC Prosecutor to commence an investigation into possible crimes against humanity committed in Afghanistan since 2003;
21. Calls on the Afghan authorities to commute all death sentences and to reintroduce a moratorium on executions with a view to achieving the permanent abolition of the death penalty; urges the Government of Afghanistan to implement in full its National Plan on the Elimination of Torture and deplores the reported use of torture and ill-treatment of

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2017)0124.

conflict-related detainees by all sides in Afghanistan;

22. Expresses its deepest concern over the massive increase in the number of internally displaced people in 2016, with over 600 000 new displacements, which could lead to a massive humanitarian crisis; encourages all parties involved to provide for these vulnerable Afghans, and calls on the Afghan Government to help reintegrate them into Afghan society; stresses that, according to estimates by the Afghan authorities, UN agencies and other humanitarian agencies, over 9,3 million people will have required humanitarian assistance by the end of 2017;
23. Welcomes the provisional entry into force of the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development between the European Union and Afghanistan on 1 December 2017, representing the first legally binding framework for relations between the two sides; further encourages the swift ratification of the agreement by EU Member States in order for it to enter into force in full;
24. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States, and the Government and Parliament of Afghanistan.