



Plenary sitting

B9-0324/2021

7.6.2021

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation in Afghanistan
(2021/2712(RSP))

Pedro Marques, Elena Yoncheva

on behalf of the S&D Group

B9-0324/2021

**European Parliament resolution on the situation in Afghanistan
(2021/2712(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Afghanistan, notably those of 19 December 2019¹ and 14 December 2017²,
- having regard to the joint statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) and the External Affairs Minister of India of 4 May 2021 on Afghanistan,
- having regard to the Communiqué of the Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, NATO, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States of 7 May 2021 on the Afghan Peace Process,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 2513 (2020) of 10 March 2020 on the situation in Afghanistan,
- having regard to the Joint Political Communiqué and the Afghanistan Partnership Framework, adopted at the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan of 23-24 November 2020,
- having regard to the Istanbul Conference on the Afghanistan Peace Process of 24 April - 4 May 2021,
- having regard to the Afghan Law on Protection of Child Rights ratified on 5 March 2019,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 29 May 2020 on Afghanistan,
- having regard to the Cooperation Agreement of 18 February 2017 on Partnership and Development between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, of the other part³,
- having regard to the Joint Way Forward agreement of 3 October 2016 on migration issues between Afghanistan and the EU,
- having regard to the Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020 published jointly by the Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority and the United Nations

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0107.

² OJ C 369, 11.10.2018, p. 85.

³ OJ L 67, 14.3.2017, p. 3.

Office on Drugs and Crime in April 2021,

- having regard to the EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child, on Children and Armed Conflict, and on Human Rights Defenders,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, the EU has had an active presence in Afghanistan to support social and economic development and coordinate international assistance;
- B. whereas violence has been steadily increasing in Afghanistan for several years; whereas there has been a further sharp spike in insurgency since September 2020; whereas Afghanistan was ranked as the most affected country in the 2020 Global Terrorism Index;
- C. whereas in 2018 the United States launched negotiations with the Taliban; whereas in February 2020 this resulted in an Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan being signed between the US and the Taliban; whereas the Afghan Government was not party to the deal;
- D. whereas direct intra-Afghan peace talks between the Afghan Government, the Taliban and other stakeholders were launched in September 2020 in Doha, Qatar; whereas the negotiations are ongoing;
- E. whereas the US-Taliban agreement included a commitment for the drawdown of US troops; whereas in April 2021, the United States announced that the withdrawal of its troops would be completed by 11 September 2021;
- F. whereas the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission (RSM) has operated in Afghanistan since January 2015, providing training, advice and assistance to Afghan security forces; whereas NATO and its member countries agreed to end the RSM and withdraw national troops by the same deadline;
- G. whereas the recent spike in violence has taken place against a background of long-term, widespread human rights violations in the country perpetuated by terrorists, armed groups and security forces, including extrajudicial killings, torture and sexual violence; whereas it is estimated that around 150 000 people have died in the 20-year war, including 35 000 civilians;
- H. whereas human rights defenders in Afghanistan are regularly intimidated, threatened and killed; whereas in 2020 the UN called on the Afghan Government to increase efforts to protect human rights defenders after nine activists were killed between January and August 2020;
- I. whereas demonstrable progress in the rights of women and girls has been made in Afghanistan since 2001, including access to education, healthcare and participation in

civic and political life; whereas these improvements are arguably the most successful achievements in the county's recent development; whereas this partial progress is now under threat and must urgently be preserved and strengthened;

- J. whereas despite these improvements, women and girls continue to face appalling threats on a daily basis, including barriers to accessing essential services and attacks including domestic, sexual and gender-based violence; whereas the 2019/20 Women, Peace and Security Index ranked Afghanistan the second-worst country for women; whereas at least 85 people were killed and 147 wounded, most of them schoolgirls, when the Sayed al-Shuhada girls' school in Kabul was bombed on 8 May 2021; whereas on 2 March 2021, three women journalists were killed in Jalalabad;
- K. whereas almost three million people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan as a result of violence; whereas the neighbouring countries, notably Iran, are hosting a large number of refugees;
- L. whereas Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with development aid accounting for approximately 40 % of the country's gross domestic product; whereas over half of Afghans live in poverty and 39 % of the population lives in extreme poverty; whereas international humanitarian actors, including the EU, are often unable to deliver aid where it is needed due to increasing violence and instability; whereas the World Food Programme was forced to suspend seasonal food security support to Alishang and Alingar districts in May 2021 due to intensified clashes between government forces and insurgents;
- M. whereas the EU committed over EUR 5.1 billion to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2020; whereas it subsequently committed EUR 1.2 billion in assistance to Afghanistan for 2021-2025 at the 2020 Geneva Conference; whereas the EU made it clear that this financial assistance is conditional on Afghanistan preserving democratic pluralism, the constitutional order, institutional transparency and accountability and the rule of law, further promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially for women, children and minorities, and including freedom of the press, and pursuing sustainable peace, development and prosperity;
- N. whereas Afghanistan has a deep rural-urban divide; whereas over 70 % of the population lives in rural areas, much of which suffers extremely high levels of poverty and is not under government control;
- O. whereas the illicit opium trade represents around a quarter of the Afghan economy; whereas in 2020 Afghanistan produced 6 300 tonnes of opium across a total area of 24 000 hectares, one of the largest harvests recorded; whereas the opium trade is a significant source of employment in rural areas and of funds for the Taliban;
- P. whereas the Joint Way Forward on migration issues signed by the EU and Afghanistan in 2016, expired in 2020; whereas Parliament expressed its opposition to the lack of parliamentary control and democratic oversight of this agreement; whereas in April 2021 the EU and Afghanistan signed a Joint Declaration on Migration following the expiry of the Joint Way Forward;

- Q. whereas climate change and natural disasters including extreme droughts pose enormous threats to lives and livelihoods in Afghanistan;
- R. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges in the country; whereas 63 % of women working in the informal sector have lost their jobs since the beginning of the health crisis; whereas the closure of schools threatens the long-term education of children, particularly girls, and increases the threat of domestic violence, recruitment of child soldiers and lack of access to health and sanitary facilities for children;
1. Deplores the alarming increase in violence in Afghanistan, including targeted killings of children, journalists, civil society and members of the judiciary; calls on all parties and notably the Taliban to immediately cease attacks against civilians, in particular in the vicinity of schools, hospitals and mosques, and to fully respect international humanitarian law;
 2. Emphasises its commitment to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and post-conflict reconstruction as the only credible path to inclusive, long-term peace, security and development;
 3. Supports in this regard the ongoing peace talks in Doha in order to achieve a political settlement to the conflict and a permanent, nationwide negotiated ceasefire;
 4. Reaffirms its long-term support beyond the troop withdrawal this year to assist Afghanistan in establishing a lasting peace; urges the EU and its Member States, NATO and the US to remain focused on this objective;
 5. Recalls that terrorist attacks in Afghanistan are perpetrated by multiple actors including the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State; underlines the real risk of greater instability and violence as US and NATO troops withdraw; reiterates, therefore, the urgent need for the EU to coordinate with stakeholders including the Afghan Government and security forces, the US, NATO and the UN to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible;
 6. Recalls that there can be no development without security and vice versa; notes in this regard that international support to Afghanistan following the withdrawal of troops must ensure a holistic approach to continue financial and technical support for security, political, economic and development reforms, with particular emphasis on strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights, notably for women, young people and minorities;
 7. Remains concerned about the dangerous climate in which civil society, including journalists and human rights defenders, are operating; urges the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Commission and the Member States to continue providing substantive support to civil society and to continue their dialogue with the Afghan Government to urgently reduce barriers to the activities of non-governmental organisations;
 8. Stresses that impunity and corruption remain serious obstacles to improving security

coordination, the provision of public services and economic reform; welcomes the creation of the Anti-Corruption Commission in Afghanistan in November 2020 to implement the newly adopted anti-corruption strategy, and urges the EEAS and the Commission to maintain high levels of EU support for tackling corruption in the country;

9. Stresses the urgent need to preserve the progress made on women's rights in Afghanistan over the last 20 years; welcomes the participation of women in the peace talks on the part of the Afghan Government and insists there must be no compromise on women's rights in the peace process; emphasises that progress on women's rights in areas of the country not under government control must also be addressed in the negotiations; would like to see greater representation and full consultation with women's organisations throughout the talks; underlines that the full participation of women in the post-reconstruction phase and in political and civic life in Afghanistan is a fundamental prerequisite to establishing sustainable peace, security and development;
10. Deeply regrets that women and girls continue to face significant challenges including domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, forced marriage and limited access to healthcare; insists that progress on these areas must remain a high priority for the EU; welcomes EU-funded projects supporting women's empowerment and participation in decision-making;
11. Welcomes the progress made on children's rights, but is extremely concerned at the recent increase in violence, in particular attacks on schools; insists that providing safe access to education for all children must be a top priority in the peace negotiations;
12. Strongly supports the conditions attached to the recent EU financial pledge for Afghanistan, particularly on human rights, including women's rights; notes that monitoring the benchmarking of these conditions is fundamental to ensuring they are effective; calls on the VP/HR and the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan to reiterate these conditions to the Afghan Government and other actors and to report back regularly to Parliament on this exercise;
13. Emphasises the risk the insecurity in Afghanistan poses to regional stability, with there being a potential for the violence to spill over into Central Asia; Notes, furthermore, that regional cooperation through a multilateral framework is therefore an important driver for sustained peace in the country;
14. Welcomes the involvement of Afghanistan in the EU strategy for Central Asia, including in the Border Management Programme in Central Asia; notes the importance of continued support for cross-border cooperation in enhancing regional security, contributing to regional connectivity and economic growth, and closing the urban-rural divide;
15. Notes that the EU can play a constructive role, in coordination with regional and international stakeholders, in the facilitation of political dialogue and the coordination of aid; urges the VP/HR and EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan to continue prioritising Afghanistan in high-level political dialogue with partners in the region, notably Iran, Pakistan and India;

16. Reiterates its regret at the lack of parliamentary oversight of the Joint Way Forward informal readmission agreement between the EU and Afghanistan; stresses that deportations to Afghanistan put the lives of returnees at grave risk and perpetuate the cycle of instability in the country; notes that the current level of violence is an unacceptable climate for returnees and readmission and insists that the Member State governments should refrain from any forced repatriation of Afghans; recalls that development assistance must not be conditional on cooperation on migration management, but must be focused on where the need is greatest, with respect for the fundamental rights of refugees;
17. Is extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in the country, including of internally displaced persons; insists that all parties, including the Taliban, must fully respect international humanitarian aid law for the unhindered disbursement of assistance to all parts of the country; urges the Afghan Government to ensure humanitarian organisations can operate with minimal bureaucratic delays;
18. Underlines the importance of addressing the urgent threats to food security as a result of climate change, droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic; urges the EEAS and the Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations to take a leading role in ensuring food aid is mobilised and coordinated in a timely manner to address looming food insecurity;
19. Recalls that the impact of opium poppy cultivation extend beyond Afghanistan's borders, affecting neighbouring countries and Europe, which is the main destination for heroin produced in Afghanistan; reiterates the need for longer-term agricultural development and assistance to create dependable jobs and income from alternatives to opium cultivation; notes that this is a necessary step to address the illicit drugs trade, money laundering and terrorist financing;
20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan, and the President of the Republic of Afghanistan.