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**TEXTS ADOPTED**

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**P9\_TA(2021)0294**

**The situation in Afghanistan**

**European Parliament resolution of 10 June 2021 on the situation in Afghanistan (2021/2712(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Afghanistan,
- having regard to the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward (JWF) on migration issues of 2 October 2016,
- having regard to the Cooperation Agreement 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 part, signed on 18 February 2017,
- having regard to the North Atlantic Council statement on the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations of 9 December 2020,
- having regard to the remarks by President Biden on the Way Forward in Afghanistan of 14 April 2021,
- having regard to the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, agreed to at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan of 4-5 October 2016,
- having regard to the 2020 International Ministerial Pledging Conference (Afghanistan Conference) held on 23 and 24 November 2020,
- 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 the Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020 published jointly by the Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority and the United Nations 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 UN Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan,
  - having regard to the UN Human Rights Council resolutions on Afghanistan,
  - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
  - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to Rule 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in February 2020 the U.S. and the Taliban signed an agreement that paved the way for the first direct talks between the Taliban and representatives of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan since 2001;
  - B. whereas on 14 April 2021 the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced the unilateral withdrawal of US troops by 11 September 2021; whereas NATO allies follow the principle of ‘in together, out together’, and will withdraw at the same time;
  - C. whereas the Afghan peace talks between the Afghan Government and Taliban started in 2020 in Doha; whereas the ceasefire agreement was not adhered to, and currently the peace talks are in a stalemate, with the Taliban waiting for the withdrawal of Allies troops;
  - D. whereas since 2001, the EU has had an active presence in Afghanistan to support social and economic development and coordinate international assistance; whereas many EU Member States, NATO partners and allied countries have contributed military and civilian resources to the stabilisation and development of Afghanistan, suffering heavy casualties and losses; whereas a stable and independent Afghanistan that can provide for itself and deny a safe haven to terrorist groups is still in the vital security interests of EU, NATO and their member countries;
  - E. whereas it is paramount to preserve the progress of the past two decades in Afghanistan, particularly regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms;
  - F. whereas representation of women and their rights in the Afghan peace talks is not proportional, and a more committed approach on this is required from the negotiating parties;
  - G. whereas women, children and ethnic minorities will be the most affected by the failure of the Afghan peace talks and by attempts to pursue a military solution to the conflict; whereas Afghan women have already started limiting their movements to reduce risk, and children’s access to education and play is hampered by the threat of violence;
  - H. whereas the security situation in Afghanistan is gradually worsening, and the number of attacks against Afghan forces is growing, as well as targeted assassinations of Afghan activists, media workers, educators, doctors, judges and government officials; whereas the number of Taliban attacks has increased significantly since the beginning of the

Afghan peace talks, aiming to take over control of government-controlled territories; whereas Afghanistan was ranked as the most affected country in the 2020 Global Terrorism Index; whereas 4 million out of the country's population of 36 million are displaced persons; whereas 3 million people are living in internal displacement as a result of violence and another 1 million because of natural disasters; whereas 2,5 million Afghans have already fled the country in search of security, with the majority settling in Iran and Pakistan;

- I. whereas Afghanistan is the largest beneficiary of EU development assistance in the world; whereas over the last 20 years the EU's contribution to Afghanistan has led to substantial gains in life expectancy, literacy, maternal and child mortality and women's rights; whereas between 2002 and 2020, the EU has provided more than EUR 4 billion, and has already pledged EUR 1,2 billion in both long-term and emergency assistance for the 2021-2025 period; whereas this pledge was accompanied by the communication by the EU and countries that together represent about 80 % of the total official development assistance to Afghanistan underlining the key elements in order to continue receiving the assistance, including continued commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and human rights;
- J. whereas there is a widespread absence of accountability for attacks and killings in Afghanistan; whereas on 12 March 2021 members of the UN Security Council condemned the alarming number of attacks deliberately targeting civilians in Afghanistan;
- K. whereas the recent spike in violence has taken place against a background of long-term widespread human rights violations in the country perpetrated 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;
- L. 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 country's recent development; whereas this partial progress is now under threat and must urgently be preserved and strengthened;
- M. 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;
- N. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically increased the poverty rate in Afghanistan; whereas COVID-19-related measures and the deteriorating security situation have resulted in restrictions in the access of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people;

- O. whereas in 2021 Afghanistan is expecting to face a drought, increasing the current number of 5,5 million people experiencing emergency level food insecurity, with an additional 17,6 million expected to face acute food insecurity;
  - P. whereas the economic cost of terrorism in Afghanistan was equivalent to almost 20 % of its GDP in 2018, and deprives Afghan children of their future, the possibility of obtaining an education, prospects for stable employment and services such as healthcare provided by the state;
  - Q. whereas Afghan businesses suffer extortion at the hands of the Taliban, who force farmers into opium cultivation and illegal mining activities;
1. Considers that Afghanistan is at a critical juncture, as the confluence of the fragile domestic situation, a deteriorating security situation, intra-Afghan peace talks effectively in a stalemate and the decision to withdraw US and NATO troops by 11 September 2021, which can bring new uncertainties, less stability, danger of intensification of internal conflicts and a vacuum that in the worst case scenario will be filled by the Taliban; expresses concern that this would be a very worrying perspective for the country and for the sustainability of the socio-political achievements and progress of the last 20 years;
  2. Expresses its deep concern and condemns in the strongest terms the alarming increase in violence in Afghanistan, including targeted killings of children, female professionals, journalists and media workers, educators, human rights defenders, civil society, activists, doctors, government officials and members of the judiciary; urges all sides to immediately agree on a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire;
  3. expresses concern about the fragility and instability of the Afghan Government and its lack of control over much of the country, which exacerbates the impact of the violence on the civilian population; calls on the Taliban to immediately cease their attacks against civilians and the national forces, and to fully respect international humanitarian law; expresses its deepest condolences and support to the victims of terror attacks and their families;
  4. Stresses the need to avoid a ‘failed state’ scenario, and reiterates 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; highlights that this is more important than ever as the date of the withdrawal of US and NATO troops is fast approaching; urges the Council, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission to prepare and present to Parliament, as soon as possible, a comprehensive strategy for future cooperation with Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO Allies’ troops, and urges the EU and its Member States, NATO and the US to remain engaged with this objective;
  5. Supports, in this regard, the immediate resumption of the peace talks in Doha in order to achieve a political settlement to the conflict and a permanent, nationwide negotiated ceasefire; underlines that only a political settlement offers hope for lasting peace, and recommends the parties to seek help from a third-party mediator, such as the United Nations, to help to agree on a political roadmap for a prosperous Afghanistan; encourages the EEAS and the Commission to assume a stronger role in urging both

sides to the negotiating table, and to offer facilitation or mediation if desired by the Afghans;

6. Reaffirms that a negotiated political settlement leading to peace must build on the economic, social and political achievements of the last 20 years; underscores that the long-term development of Afghanistan will depend on accountability, good governance, the sustainable provision of human security, including the reduction of poverty and the creation of job opportunities, access to social and health services, education, and the protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights;
7. Urges the Afghan Government to actively involve the Afghan Parliament in all relevant processes, to end all measures that prevent effective cooperation between government and parliament and to improve parliamentary scrutiny rights, while the Afghan Parliament should represent the diverse Afghan population; stresses the necessity for continued support for the holding of free and fair elections, in line with international standards, support for election observation missions to the country and for improving the transparency of government expenditure in order for the Government of Afghanistan to be fully accountable to its citizens;
8. Recalls that in order to build on the achievements of the last 20 years, the Afghan state should be genuinely committed to fighting and preventing terrorism and armed groups, drug production and trafficking, and addressing the root causes of and managing irregular and forced migration; tackling regional instability; striving for poverty eradication; preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism; fighting against the impunity of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law;
9. Deplores that before signing the Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation, the Commission did not present the declaration to Parliament, and that Parliament had no chance to express its opinion on it; calls on the Commission to carry out a human rights impact assessment on the Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation;
10. expresses concern about the threat posed by terrorism to Afghanistan and the region, in particular the continuing presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL-Da'esh) and their affiliates, in particular ISIL-Khorasan Province and Al-Qaida; recalls that the terrorist acts in Afghanistan are perpetrated by multiple actors including the Taliban, Al-Qaida 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;
11. Condemns all terrorist activity and all terrorist attacks in Afghanistan; underscores the importance of the effective fight against financing of terrorism and of dismantling financial networks supporting terrorism; is very worried about the findings of the UN Monitoring Team's report indicating that the relationship between the Taliban and Al-Qaida has grown deeper, and its warning that the Taliban would be opposed to peace talks and prefer a military takeover. takes note, furthermore, of the reports that indicate that the Taliban is actively preparing military operations in 2021;
12. Recalls that there can be no sustainable 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, including the Afghan national defence and security forces, and economic and development reforms, with particular emphasis on strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights, notably for women, young people and minorities;

13. Recognises the work of local and international NGOs, which provide services, assistance and relief to the Afghan people despite the security risks; remains concerned about the dangerous climate in which civil society organisations (CSOs), 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; urges the Afghan authorities, the Taliban and all the other relevant actors to ensure the safety of local and international CSOs, NGOs and humanitarian organisations;
14. Calls for a credible and transparent investigation under UN auspices into the recent attack which targeted a girls' school killing 85 people, mostly girls between the age of 11 and 17 and the attack on 12 May 2020 on the maternity wing of the Dasht-e Barchi hospital in Kabul supported by Médecins Sans Frontières; invites the EEAS, Commission and Member States to consider urging the UN Human Rights Council to establish a commission of inquiry into serious violations of international humanitarian law in Afghanistan;
15. 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 to tackling corruption in the country;
16. Emphasises that European support will remain conditional on preserving and building upon the achievements of the past 20 years, on effectively enhancing inclusive and accountable governance, strengthening institutions, democratic pluralism, the rule of law, combating corruption, strengthening independent media, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all Afghans, especially women, children, all persons belonging to minorities and groups at risk; recalls that girls' right to education, which is a great achievement of the last 20 years, should be undisputed; stresses the need for clear benchmarks and monitoring mechanisms to measure the progress made and the efficient and transparent use of European funds;
17. Stresses the absolute imperative of preserving the progress made on women's rights in Afghanistan over the last 20 years; recalls 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; urges greater representation and full consultation of 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; calls on the EEAS, Commission and Member States to further support the empowerment of women as a key condition for continuous financial support to the country;

18. 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;
19. Reiterates the need for continuous EU support to assist Afghanistan in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, to provide the Afghans with vaccines, and to help organise vaccination efforts;
20. Underlines the importance of addressing the urgent threats to food security as a result of climate change, droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic; calls on the EU to stand by its commitment made at the 2020 Afghanistan donor conference, and urges the EEAS and the Commission's DG ECHO (Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) to take a leading role and close the funding gap so as to ensure food aid is mobilised and coordinated in a timely manner in order to address looming food insecurity; urges all donors to maintain or increase their humanitarian aid, especially their support for the Afghan health system and the promotion of access to healthcare by Afghan women and girls;
21. Recalls that the impact of opium poppy cultivation extends beyond Afghanistan's borders, affecting neighbouring countries and Europe, which is the main destination for heroin produced in Afghanistan; emphasises the need for the Afghan Government to strengthen efforts to counter this threat, and reiterates the need for longer-term agricultural development and assistance to create dependable jobs and incomes from alternatives to opium cultivation; notes that this is a necessary step to address the illicit drugs trade, money laundering and terrorist financing;
22. Points at the potential for economic growth in Afghanistan from developing its natural resources in a sustainable manner; stresses that European aid for the development of infrastructure could benefit the Afghan people by providing employment and resources for critical public services and ensure environmental protection;
23. Stresses the need to use European funds to invest in improving the regional connectivity to facilitate trade and transit, which would give Afghanistan the means to grow economically;
24. Recalls that Afghanistan is a landlocked country situated at the junction connecting Asia and the Middle East, and recognises that support and positive cooperation from neighbouring central-Asian countries and regional powers, in particular China, Iran, India, Russia and Pakistan, are essential to the stabilisation, development and economic viability of Afghanistan; calls on the EEAS and the Member States to intensify their dialogue with Afghanistan's neighbouring countries; underlines the crucial role of these countries in the stabilisation of Afghanistan and in not allowing it to descend into chaos once foreign troops leave; stresses the need for increased EU-US coordination on Afghanistan in order to maintain an important role for them in Afghanistan to the extent possible;
25. Recalls the responsibility of the governments of the countries that are withdrawing their troops from Afghanistan to protect, if needed grant visas and repatriate local staff, in particular translators, who have been supporting their efforts and whose lives might be

now in grave danger; calls for this to be preceded by a thorough individual assessment, taking full account of all eligibility and security aspects;

26. Calls on the EEAS, the Commission and the Member States to ensure the security of European forces and staff in Afghanistan, as well as of local staff who work or have worked for Member States' representations or the EU Delegation in the country; asks the EEAS and the Commission to contribute funding for an enhanced security zone to ensure a diplomatic presence after the withdrawal of troops;
27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the Government and Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.