

## Afghanistan: MEPs discuss what to do next



A group of Afghan nationals wait on the tarmac after disembarking from a first Spanish Air Force Airbus A400M © Belen Diaz / AFP

### **People at risk following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan should be given help, MEPs said in a debate on the country's future.**

Members stressed the need for the EU to help people leave the country safely in the wake of the Taliban's return to power, during the debate on 14 September. "All those in the focus of the Taliban - whether they are activists, women's rights advocates, teachers or civil servants, journalists - we have to ensure that they can come to us," said Michael Gahler (EPP, Germany). He also said neighbouring countries must be supported in helping the arriving refugees.

Iratxe García Pérez (S&D, Spain) said it is important to look at how to stabilise the country and protect the rights of Afghans. “We have established a centre in Madrid to support those who worked with us in Afghanistan and their families and relations and we need to do much more of this and establish a proper humanitarian corridor supported by the External Action Service so that the thousands of people who are still in Afghanistan can get the requisite visas and leave the country safely.”

Mick Wallace (the Left/Ireland) deplored the fact that the fight against terrorism has led to innocent people being killed or forced to migrate. “Europe now needs to provide sustainable refuge to those who have fled the mess we helped to create.”

“What we have seen in Afghanistan is certainly a tragedy for the Afghan people, a setback for the West and a potential game-changer for international relations,” said foreign policy chief Josep Borrell.

“To have any chance of influencing events, we have no other option but to engage with the Taliban,” he added, explaining that engagement doesn’t mean recognition.



Some of the speakers during the debate

Other MEPs said it was not only about getting people out of Afghanistan, but also about looking after those remaining in the country. “We have to secure the lives of Afghan change makers and

civil activists and to save millions facing poverty and famine," said Petras Auštrevičius (Renew, Lithuania). "Afghanistan should not be led by radical mullahs, but by the educated, open-minded and (those) oriented towards the common good of Afghans."

Jérôme Rivière (ID, France) looked beyond Afghanistan to the impact on the EU. "Member states have to protect themselves and to protect their populations. The people of Europe should not be subjected to more migration such as the one that followed Syrian conflict. Like you, I am concerned about the fate of civilians and women in Afghanistan and I do not like to see the Islamists rise to power, but I refuse another wave of migration from Afghanistan."

Tineke Strik (Greens/EFA, the Netherlands) suggested it is time to reflect and learn from this debacle to create a stronger and effective foreign policy. "The Afghan people face an enormous humanitarian disaster, shortages of food, water and other basic needs. Those Afghan people were counting on us. So let us do whatever we can to protect them against the Taliban terror," she said, calling for EU-coordinated evacuations, humanitarian visas and access to aid. "Help the people and prevent any type of recognition of the Taliban as long as human rights are at risk," she said.

Anna Fotyga (ECR, Poland) called for a multilateral, international approach to Afghanistan, as was done 20 years ago: "I think that multilateralism is the way to solve this problem. (...) Now we have to have as broad as possible efforts and a concrete strategy for Afghanistan."

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