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The situation in Afghanistan: consequences for Europe and the region

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
Rapporteur: Sir Tony LLOYD, United Kingdom, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

Summary

The military withdrawal of the United States of America and its NATO allies and partners and the Taliban's return to power have opened a phase of political uncertainties and heightened risks for peace, stability and security, in Afghanistan, the region and beyond.

Council of Europe member States should work towards achieving a coherent, co-ordinated, and concerted response by the international community, as the only possible way to tackle the immediate and future momentous challenges that have arisen.

The United Nations has a pivotal role to play in co-ordinating the efforts aimed at tackling the harrowing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which affects the lives and livelihood of millions of people. In addition, the creation of a specific, robust, independent United Nations mandate to monitor human rights violations in Afghanistan would allow for reliable information to be brought to the attention of the international community and for greater accountability.

While dialogue with the Taliban is necessary, it should be limited to a cautious, pragmatic, and operational engagement. Any possibility for it be upgraded should be conditional upon a number of requirements.

Dialogue and partnership with the countries of the region should be strengthened given their frontline role in addressing transnational challenges such as migration, terrorism, drug trafficking, smuggling in persons and trafficking in human beings.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4611 of 27 September 2021.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly expresses its deepest concern at the situation in Afghanistan following the military withdrawal of the United States of America and its NATO allies and partners and the Taliban's return to power, which has opened a phase of political uncertainties in which violence continues and the potential for civil war is not excluded. This state of affairs leads to heightened risks for peace, stability and security in Afghanistan, the region and beyond.

2. The Assembly is convinced that tackling the immediate and future momentous challenges posed by this situation requires a coherent, co-ordinated and concerted response by the international community and believes that Council of Europe member States should spare no effort to achieve this objective.

3. The first and foremost imperative should be addressing the harrowing humanitarian crisis, which affects the lives and livelihood of millions of people due to the combination of a protracted military conflict, successive droughts, and the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the international conference organised by the United Nations in Geneva (13-14 September 2021) during which donors pledged more than one billion US dollars in humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan.

4. The Assembly regrets that, despite the unanimous and repeated calls by the international community and the Taliban's initial public statements, the interim government is neither inclusive nor representative. The Assembly believes that only a government which reflects Afghanistan's political, religious and ethnic diversity, includes women, and engages in a genuine process of reconciliation can lead to a durable political settlement and could aspire to legitimacy and international recognition.

5. Similarly, extremely alarmed by credible reports of serious human rights and humanitarian law violations by the Taliban, the Assembly recalls that, as *de facto* authorities, they have obligations, and they can be held accountable in this regard. To this end, the Assembly considers the setting up of a specific, robust, independent mandate of the United Nations to monitor human rights violations in Afghanistan as the best way to collect objective and systematic information on the ground and bring it to the attention of the international community.

6. Reiterating in the strongest terms its condemnation of terrorism in all circumstances, the Assembly expresses its deep concern at the high number of Taliban figures subjected to the system of sanctions established by Resolution 1267 (1999) of the UN Security Council being members of the interim government.

7. It recalls that the fight against terrorism is one of the formidable transnational challenges arising from the current situation which could potentially spill-over with disastrous and destabilising effects, together with organised crime, drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. In this context, the Assembly underlines that addressing these challenges will require a stronger dialogue, partnership and solidarity with countries of the region.

8. In light of the above, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:

8.1. work towards achieving a coherent, co-ordinated and concerted response in relation to Afghanistan;

8.2. step up efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan;

8.3. continue the evacuation of foreign nationals and eligible Afghans, and make additional efforts to ensure co-ordination and effectiveness of evacuation operations;

8.4. support the central role of the United Nations and its specialised agencies in co-ordinating international efforts in relation to Afghanistan, starting with humanitarian assistance;

8.5. support the setting up of a specific, robust and independent mandate of the United Nations Human Rights Council to monitor the respect of human rights in Afghanistan;

8.6. establish a cautious, pragmatic and operational engagement with the Taliban with a view to addressing the areas of concern which are identified in the present resolution;

8.7. make any upgrading of their operational engagement with the Taliban conditional upon:

8.7.1. the respect of human rights and humanitarian law;

8.7.2. the rejection of terrorism and violent extremism, as demonstrated by conclusive actions;

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 28 September 2021.

8.7.3. the formation of an inclusive and representative government and starting a reconciliation process;

8.7.4. the provision of unhindered access to Afghanistan for the United Nations and for humanitarian relief agencies;

8.7.5. the practical facilitation of the evacuation operations organised by foreign countries;

8.8. ensure that any removal of Taliban members from the list of UN sanctions pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) of the UN Security Council be conditional upon an actual change of the individual circumstances which led to their inclusion in the first place;

8.9. support the establishment of mechanisms aimed at ensuring that the freezing of Afghan financial assets does not aggravate the socio-economic situation of the population;

8.10. find ways to provide development aid to Afghanistan to avoid the collapse of the economic situation, which would further aggravate the humanitarian crisis and act as a push factor for migration;

8.11. shoulder their moral and legal responsibilities as regards refugee protection and, in this context to:

8.11.1. ensure the respect of the principle of non-refoulement;

8.11.2. make greater resettlement opportunities available for Afghans, especially for those who are more at risk and vulnerable;

8.11.3. introduce humanitarian visas, temporary protection or special visa programmes, especially for women;

8.11.4. reassess current and recent asylum applications by Afghans in light of recent developments;

8.11.5. refrain from enforcing forced returns to Afghanistan;

8.12. multiply diplomatic efforts, at global and regional level, to promote peace, security and stability in Afghanistan and the region and to develop a common, coherent approach toward the Taliban.

9. In addition, given the frontline role of the countries of the region, in particular neighbouring countries, in tackling the consequences of the Taliban takeover, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to make available political and financial support to help them in their efforts to:

9.1. provide shelter and protection to people fleeing Afghanistan in dignified conditions;

9.2. tackle threats such as terrorism, violent extremism, drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings and other transnational criminal activities.

10. The Assembly also asks its Bureau to consider strengthening inter-parliamentary dialogue between the Assembly and countries from Central Asia and their regional organisations, with a view to contributing to greater dialogue, mutual understanding and resilience in the face of the need to promote regional stability and avoid the risks of any further spill-over.

11. Furthermore, the Assembly calls on the Taliban, as the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan to:

11.1. put an end to violence;

11.2. engage in a broad national dialogue with a view to setting up a representative and inclusive government including women, members of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as representatives of the previous government;

11.3. introduce an amnesty for Afghans having been members or the security forces, civil servants, and those having held public responsibilities under the previous government, while refraining from and sanctioning any form or harassment or persecution against them;

11.4. facilitate the safe departure of foreign nationals and Afghans in possession of the necessary documentation and who wish to leave;

11.5. ensure the respect of human rights and humanitarian law;

11.6. respect the cultural, social and legal progress that has been achieved in the past twenty years as regards human rights and individual freedoms and refrain from any statement or action that could undermine it, including as regards:

11.6.1. girls' access to education;

11.6.2. women's freedom of movement, access to work, healthcare and sports;

11.6.3. representation and active participation of women and persons from minorities in all areas of public and political life;

11.7. allow full, safe, and unhindered access to all areas of Afghanistan for the United Nations, its specialised agencies and implementing partners, and all humanitarian actors engaged in humanitarian relief activity, including with respect to internally displaced persons;

11.8. accede to requests for information or co-operation by the United Nations, its specialised agencies, bodies and mechanisms;

11.9. respect the immunities and inviolability of diplomatic missions and staff;

11.10. refrain from, and effectively counter, any action or statement that could support terrorism and violent extremism in or outside Afghanistan, including recruiting, providing training, financial support or shelter to terrorists;

11.11. take resolute action to tackle the production and trafficking of narcotics and dismantle networks involved in domestic or translational criminal activities.

12. The Assembly calls on the national parliaments of Council of Europe Member and Observer States as well as parliaments enjoying the Observer or partner for democracy status to scrutinise their governments and hold them to account for the way in which they respond to the current situation.

13. Finally, the Assembly considers that, given the far-reaching implications of the current situation in Afghanistan, it should continue to be seized on the matter.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Sir Tony Lloyd, rapporteur

1. Procedural background

1. The present report has been prepared on the basis of a request for an urgent debate presented by the five political groups under Rule 51.

2. Following the decision of the Parliamentary Assembly to include the debate in its agenda and to transmit the request to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, I was appointed rapporteur on 27 September 2021.

3. On that day, the committee organised a hearing on "The situation in Afghanistan: consequences for Europe and the region", with the participation of high-level speakers:

– Mette Knudsen, Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Afghanistan, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA),

– Ambassador Zamir Kabulov, Presidential Envoy to Afghanistan, Russian Federation,

– Laurel Miller, Programme Director for Asia, International Crisis Group.

4. Thanks to the contribution of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, Alexander Mundt, Senior Policy Advisor Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also participated in the hearing.

5. The invaluable expert insight of the speakers contributed to providing information for the report and shaping some of the considerations that are contained therein, and I thank them.

6. Given its urgent nature, the report cannot be as exhaustive and detailed as the gravity and complexity of the situation would require. On the other hand, it is an umbrella report which aims at broaching, in general terms, the main issues which should be at the heart of the concerns of Council of Europe member States. When discussing the possible follow-up to be given, the Bureau of the Assembly may want to consider additional work to be carried under an ordinary procedure, which would make it possible to elaborate a more in-depth analysis and recommendations.

2. Introduction

7. Afghanistan is geographically far from Europe but what is happening in this land-locked central Asian country is having and will have repercussions on our continent and beyond.

8. At the end of August 2021, the United States and a coalition of its allies – most of whom NATO members and partners – completed the withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan. By the beginning of September, the Taliban had announced the formation of an interim government, proclaimed the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", and extended their control to the whole country.[3]

9. Since April 2021, when President Joe Biden confirmed the final date of the drawdown, the advance of the Taliban seemed unstoppable, with towns and villages falling one after the other into their hands, sometimes without fighting.[4] When the Taliban entered Kabul on 15 August, the world was witness to the hasty evacuation of foreigners and Afghan citizens who had been working for foreign countries. The images of the crowds at Kabul airport and people clinging on the outside of planes while they were taking off testified to the fear and despair of the population. To add to the general climate of chaos and confusion, on 26 August a suicide bomb attack by the Islamic State Khorosan Province (ISIS-K) deliberately targeted civilians and personnel assisting in the evacuation operations, claiming the lives of more than 200 people, including 13 US Marines.[5]

10. The departure of American forces and their allies from Afghanistan, the way in which it took place, and the Taliban takeover are events of great political significance. At the moment they are the subject of scrutiny in many countries that were part of the foreign military presence. Parliaments are questioning their governments on their failure to foretell the rapidity of the Taliban advance, on the effectiveness of the advice, training and capacity-building provided to the Afghan military and civilian structures in the past 20 years, and on the

3. See a timeline of events in Appendix 1.
4. "Afghanistan: Mapping the advance of the Taliban", Infographic News, *Al Jazeera*, 15 August 2021.
5. "Kabul bombings: Scores killed in ISIL attacks at Kabul airport", ISIL/ISIS News, *Al Jazeera*, 26 August 2021.

management of the evacuation operations and the extent of multilateral co-ordination. Veterans who served in Afghanistan and the families of those who lost their lives are asking why the Afghan allies were abandoned to themselves and why the sacrifice of their loved ones was wasted. Many underline the failure of attempts to export democracy and engage in State-building. In some countries, criticism has led to the resignation of ministers and cabinet reshufflings.[6]

11. While assessing what happened is certainly crucial to identify responsibilities and draw lessons for the future, it is also important to gauge the middle and long-term implications of these events. The Taliban's rise to power is already having dire consequences for Afghans, who face a disastrous economic and humanitarian situation and see their rights – including human rights – curtailed and violated.

12. Furthermore, the American departure and the miscalculations and failed risk-assessment that surrounded it are a major blow to the image and the credibility of the United States. From a geopolitical point of view, they represent a momentous power shift at global level, leaving a void in a highly valuable strategic region which will be filled by others. The Taliban takeover may also have wide-ranging effects as regards migration movements, narcotics production and trafficking, smuggling of weapons and money-laundering, and may lead to a recrudescence of terrorism and violent extremism.

13. A phase of uncertainty is now beginning, in which governments are faced with the moral dilemma of whether and how to engage with the Taliban, as they are the unavoidable channel to reach out to the population and address a wide range of challenges afflicting the country, some of which may spill over. It also remains an open question whether the international community will be able to find a common approach to the Taliban.

3. The Taliban's return to power

14. It may have seemed a dazzling victory but the Taliban's return to power is the result of a complex process which built up since 2001, when they were toppled because of their refusal to surrender Osama Bin Laden to the United States.

15. That year, the Bonn Agreement[7] brought together, under the auspices of the United Nations, 25 prominent Afghan leaders who had fought against the Taliban. It laid down the foundation for State-building efforts in Afghanistan, providing a framework for the Constitution that was established in 2004 and the presidential and parliamentary elections that followed.[8]

16. By emphasising the need for strong, centralised government institutions, the Agreement failed to take into account Afghanistan's cultural, religious, ethnic and political specificities. With hindsight, many observers agree that the State-building roadmap which was set out in the Bonn Agreement was an inappropriate model for Afghanistan due to the country's political and ethnic fragmentation.[9] This mistake subsequently contributed to aggravating rather than addressing a range of problems, including corruption, incompetency, and poor governance.[10]

17. After being ousted from power, the Taliban continued a guerrilla fight against foreign and Afghan troops from their strongholds in mountainous and rural areas, making widespread use of indiscriminate or targeted killings of civilians and other means of intimidation of the population.

18. Exploiting the weaknesses and internal rivalries of the Afghan institutional apparatus, especially at local level, the Taliban managed to reassert influence across rural areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan. By 2007, large swathes of the country were under their control.

19. Following the killing of Osama Bin Laden in his hideout in Pakistan in 2011, NATO agreed to change the nature of its mission and reduce its presence.[11] On 28 December 2014, NATO ended combat operations in Afghanistan[12] and officially transferred full security responsibility to the Afghan government. At the same time, Operation Resolute Support was established with the aim of helping the Afghan security forces and institutions develop the capacity to defend Afghanistan and protect its citizens in the long term.[13]

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6. "Second Dutch minister resigns over Afghan evacuation crisis", Netherlands, *The Guardian*, 17 September 2021; "Dominic Raab removed as UK foreign secretary in Johnson cabinet reshuffle", *CNN*, 15 September 2021.
7. Bonn Agreement, Embassy and Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the EU and the NATO (*afghanembassy-brussels.org*).
8. "The new Afghan administration", *The Guardian*, 5 December 2001.
9. "Centralization Is at the Core of Afghanistan's Problems", *The Diplomat*, 24 August 2021.
10. A Roadmap for Afghanistan, Council on Foreign Relations (*cfr.org*).

20. By then, it was clear to all the parties involved that the end of the conflict could not be achieved only by military means. The Taliban set up a political office in Doha (Qatar) and developed diplomatic contacts with the authorities in China, Iran, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey.[14] They also set up a public affairs team, relying on social media to revive moral and raise support, in stark contrast with their previous decision to ban the Internet.[15]

21. The turning point happened in 2018, when the newly appointed US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, began direct talks with the Taliban in Doha.[16] These efforts culminated in the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States and the Taliban, on 29 February 2020, which is considered by some critics as an additional milestone towards the Taliban's return to power.[17]

22. The Agreement commits the United States to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan within 14 months while the Taliban agree not to "allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including Al Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies" and to engage in intra-Afghan negotiations in view of reaching a political settlement.

23. With this diplomatic process under way in Qatar, the Taliban continued to make military and political advances on the ground. The Taliban's attacks against Afghan security forces even intensified, with 2020 emerging as "the most violent year ever recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan, exceeding 25 000 incidents, equal to a 10% increase over 2019. The level of violence surged from 12 September 2020 onwards as intra-Afghan talks began in Doha".[18] At the same time, the withdrawal of US and allied troops continued according to the schedule set out in the Agreement.

24. The Taliban's success accelerated further after the announcement of the final date of the withdrawal by President Joe Biden. The rapidity of their advance was grossly misjudged. Conversely, the capacity of the Afghan forces to counter the attacks was overestimated, especially in the absence of allied support.[19] In a gross intelligence failure, as late as 12 August 2021 the White House forecast that Kabul may fall in 90 days.[20]

25. After entering the capital, the Taliban held a press conference on 17 August, announcing an amnesty for all those who had worked with the foreign military forces, their willingness to maintain order and security and to avoid looting and violence, including against foreign embassies and international organisations. They also announced their commitment to the rights of women within the framework of Sharia, and the formation of an inclusive government.[21]

26. Despite the display of public assurances, international calls, including by the UN Security Council, for the Taliban to establish an inclusive and representative government, with the meaningful participation of women and minorities, fell flat.

27. The provisional government which was announced at the beginning of September is led by Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, one of the movement's founders. Out of the 33 members, many were already prominent Taliban leaders before 2001. There are no women and no representatives of the previous Afghan government. All government members belong to the Pashtun ethnic group, apart from the Deputy Prime Minister Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, who is an ethnic Uzbek, and 2 ethnic Tajiks.

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11. Chicago Summit Declaration, 20 May 2012.
12. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).
13. NATO – Topic: Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan (2015-2021). See the list of Council of Europe member States who provided troops to the mission in Appendix 2.
14. "The Rise of Taliban Diplomacy", *The Diplomat*, 3 January 2017.
15. How—and why—the Taliban won Afghanistan's high-tech war, *MIT Technology Review*, 23 August 2021; "How the Taliban Turned Social Media Into a Tool for Control", *The New York Times* (*nytimes.com*).
16. "US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban's rise", Taliban News, *Al Jazeera*, 23 August 2021.
17. S/2020/184 (undocs.org).
18. "Twelfth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2557 (2020) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan", S/2021/486, 1 June 2021, paragraph 25, page 10.
19. "The Reasons for the Collapse of Afghan Forces", Center for Strategic and International Studies (*csis.org*).
20. "Taliban wrecks havoc in Afghanistan; humanitarian crisis likely as Kabul could be taken over in 90 days"; *CNBC TV* (*cnbctv18.com*), 12 August 2021.
21. "Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul", Taliban News, *Al Jazeera*, 17 August 2021.

28. As it has been remarked, “The dominant feature very well may be a government inclusive of factions within the Taliban”.[22] Indeed, even if the Taliban are often described as a unified entity, they are fraught with internal feuds, splinter groups and clan allegiances.[23]

29. At the time of writing, the authority of the Taliban extends *de facto* to the whole territory of Afghanistan. This situation raises a dilemma for the members of the international community: while no country has so far manifested the intention to officially recognise the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, engaging with them may be useful and even necessary with a view to addressing challenges such as the humanitarian and human rights situation, the fight against terrorism and smuggling of weapons and drugs.

30. It remains to be seen whether the international community will be able to put up a common front or whether there will be differences in the level of engagement and above all whether it will be submitted to conditionality, as called for by high level representatives of the United Nations[24] and the European Union.[25]

4. Evacuation

31. The evacuation of civilians from Afghanistan was the first example of pragmatic engagement with the Taliban. From 14 to 30 August 2021, the United States relied upon the Taliban to maintain security checkpoints around Kabul's airport and filter those with the correct paperwork to be evacuated. In the wake of the suicide bomb attack at Kabul airport on 26 August, reports suggest that the US shared intelligence with the Taliban to thwart their common enemy – the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) – which claimed responsibility for the attack.[26]

32. While the evacuation was organised under great pressure, it was one of the largest airlift operations of all times, with more than 100 000 people being flown out of Afghanistan since 14 August 2021.

33. The Gulf States have been instrumental staging posts for evacuation flights for Western countries' citizens as well as Afghan interpreters, journalists and others, with more than 40 000 people being taken out via Qatar and more than 35 000 via the United Arab Emirates. The largest base handling the initial outflow of Afghan evacuees was Al Udeid Air Base outside Doha, where evacuees were vetted against the National Counterterrorism Center's terrorist watch list, as required by US law.

34. The Ramstein Air Base, in Germany, the largest US Air Force base in Europe, was also a hub for processing Afghan evacuees who had assisted the United States and its allies during the Afghan war. About a fifth of all evacuees from Kabul passed through Ramstein. The base has the capacity for up to 12 000 evacuees. Evacuees went through medical screenings and were biometrically scanned. As of August 31, a total of 11 700 people had been flown from Ramstein to the United States or another safe location.[27] Many countries have announced that they would temporarily host evacuated Afghans on behalf of the United States.

35. On 6 September 2021, after the military withdrawal, the United States evacuated four American citizens from Afghanistan via an overland route, marking the first overland evacuation facilitated by the US Department of State since the military withdrawal.[28] At the time of writing, several Qatar airways flights have continued to evacuate civilians.[29]

36. As demanded by the international community,[30] it is of the utmost importance that the Taliban continue to ensure safe passage for all foreign citizens and Afghan nationals with travel authorisation from foreign States to leave Afghanistan, as they have promised in public statements and bilateral contacts.[31]

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22. “Taliban Announce Acting Government Lineup”, *The Diplomat*, 8 September 2021.
23. “Taliban Fragmentation: Fact, Fiction, and Future”, United States Institute of Peace (*usip.org*).
24. Briefing by Special Representative Deborah Lyons to the Security Council, UNAMA (*unmissions.org*).
25. “EU has no choice but to engage with Taliban, says foreign policy chief”, Afghanistan, *The Guardian*, 14 September 2021.
26. “Afghanistan: Do Islamic State group jihadists pose a real challenge to the Taliban?”, *France 24*, 31 August 2021.
27. 2021 Kabul airlift.
28. “US helped 4 US citizens leave Afghanistan overland, official says”, *CNN*, 7 September 2021.
29. “Afghanistan: à bord d'un vol d'évacuation depuis Kaboul, 49 ressortissants français et leurs familles en route pour le Qatar”, *Le Monde*, 10 September 2021; “Afghanistan: First foreigners fly out of Kabul since US pull-out”, *BBC*, 9 September 2021.
30. Afghanistan: Joint statement of international partners on evacuation travel assurances, European External Action Service (*europa.eu*), 29 August 2021.
31. Joint Statement on Afghanistan Evacuation Travel Assurances.

37. At the same time, Council of Europe member States should ensure that appropriate schemes are set up for Afghans to be evacuated to their territories, with clear eligibility criteria and accessible information being provided.

38. In order to facilitate the repatriation of EU nationals who are still in Afghanistan and, in so far as possible, the evacuation of Afghans who have been working with EU member States, the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs are considering establishing an EU presence in Kabul, which seems a realistic possibility following informal discussions with the Taliban.[32]

5. The humanitarian situation

39. On 13 September 2021, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, convened a High-level Ministerial Meeting on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, describing the situation currently experienced by Afghans as "their most perilous hour".[33] The Taliban's return to power is adding a layer to the pre-existing dire humanitarian situation experienced by the population, due to the combination of a protracted military conflict, repeated droughts, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

40. Years of fighting have displaced nearly 3 million people within Afghanistan, to which nearly 600 000 should be added since the beginning of 2021.[34] It is estimated that, to date, out of a population 39 million people, 14 million are exposed to acute food insecurity, including 2 million children who are at risk of malnutrition.[35]

41. The economy is on the brink of collapse. The price of staple goods and fuel is increasing; there are widespread food shortages and a lack of basic services and commodities. Following the Taliban's takeover, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank suspended Afghanistan's access to funds and the local currency is at an all-time low. Most of the assets of the Afghan central bank are held outside Afghanistan, beyond the Taliban's reach.[36]

42. The ministerial meeting offered an opportunity for the UN Secretary-General to set out his vision:[37]

– first of all, the United Nations should remain in Afghanistan and take leadership for providing humanitarian assistance;

– secondly, it would be impossible to provide humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan without engaging with the *de facto* authorities of the country;

– and thirdly, providing humanitarian assistance would not be enough if the economy collapses. The consequences of this scenario would include a mass exodus and greater regional instability.

43. Words of caution about conditionality in relation to humanitarian assistance were spoken by Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross: "A long period of limbo, where investment hinges on political recognition of the government, will only lead to a deeper humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian action should not be conditioned to political, human rights or other stipulations. This is a dangerous pathway. It weakens respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian actors; and it erodes the principles of neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action".[38]

44. António Guterres also confirmed that, a few days earlier, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, had held talks with the Taliban in Kabul. Following these exchanges, the Taliban committed to guaranteeing that the United Nations would have access to the whole territory, and to providing the necessary security for UN convoys to reach insecure areas.[39]

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32. Informal meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers (Gymnich): Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the press conference, European External Action Service (*europa.eu*), 3 September 2021.
33. "Support Afghans in their most perilous hour, urges UN's Guterres", UN News, 13 September 2021.
34. "Afghanistan: Drought", February 2021, *ReliefWeb*.
35. "Asia and the Pacific: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot (24-30 August 2021)", Afghanistan, *ReliefWeb*, 31 August 2021.
36. "Afghanistan: World Bank halts aid after Taliban takeover", *BBC News*, 25 August 2021; "IMF suspends Afghanistan's access to funds", *BBC News*, 19 August 2021.
37. Secretary-General's transcript of the Secretary-General's press conference on the High-Level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan, United Nations Secretary-General, 13 September 2021.
38. Peter Maurer Statement on Afghanistan, ICRC, 13 September 2021.
39. "Afghanistan: UN humanitarian chief calls for 'rights…well-being' of women", UN News, 5 September 2021.

45. The outcome of the gathering showed the willingness of the international community to respond to the crisis, with a total of 1.2 billion US dollars in humanitarian and development aid being promised, nearly doubling the initial sum requested by the flash appeal.[40] Amongst the main donors, the European Commission pledged to increase its contribution for humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to 200 million €.[41] It should be recalled that, since 2002, the EU has provided more than 4 billion € in development aid to Afghanistan, making the country the largest beneficiary of EU development assistance in the world.

46. Since 14 September 2021, UN Humanitarian Air Service flights into Afghanistan have resumed, transporting food, medical supplies and other basic relief items. In anticipation of the high food needs and further disruptions to supply chains, food and other stocks have been positioned at strategic border points in Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.[42]

47. There remain huge challenges, however, given the magnitude of the needs. In addition, UN agencies on the ground report that, despite the assurances of the Taliban in Kabul, in some provinces female humanitarian workers have only been permitted to work in specific sectors, largely in the areas of health and education while in others they are not currently permitted to work.[43]

6. Displacement and international protection

48. Already before the current crisis, Afghans made up one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. There are 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees in the world.[44] It is estimated that since the beginning of 2021 over 558 000 Afghans have been internally displaced by the armed conflict within the country (as of 23 August). Some 80% of these newly displaced persons are women and children.

49. In August 2021, UNHCR presented its Regional Preparedness and Emergency Plan for Afghan Refugees,[45] calling on neighbouring countries to keep their borders open to allow those who may be at risk to seek safety, irrespective of whether they were in possession of passports and visa documentation.

50. Currently, there are already 1 448 100 Afghan refugees in Pakistan, 780 000 in Iran and 10 700 in Tajikistan. UNHCR points out that any major influx into Afghanistan's neighbours will require the support of the international community, in a spirit of shared responsibility and burden-sharing. The UN refugee agency also warns that the number of people fleeing will likely continue to rise and that, in the most pessimistic scenario, around 500 000 new Afghan refugees are expected in the region by the end of the year.

51. The issue of a potential influx of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan was discussed by the EU Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs on 31 August 2021. In their joint statement, the Ministers agreed that the EU should remain committed "to support vulnerable Afghans, and in particular women and children, both in Afghanistan and in the region". To this end, "the EU will strengthen its support to third countries, in particular the neighbouring and transit countries, hosting large numbers of migrants and refugees, to reinforce their capacities to provide protection, dignified and safe reception conditions and sustainable livelihood for refugees and host communities."[46]

52. EU Ministers also expressed their determination to avoid smugglers and human traffickers exploiting the situation and to co-ordinate their response with a view to protecting the EU external borders. In order to meet international protection needs, Ministers wished to step up "external operations for asylum capacity building" and are open to support voluntary resettlement schemes, prioritising vulnerable persons such as women and children.

53. In its resolution of 16 September 2021,[47] the European Parliament (EP) went further, underlining that providing support for the reception of Afghan refugees and migrants in neighbouring countries should not be an alternative for a fully-fledged European asylum and migration policy. The EP demands that the EU shoulders its moral responsibilities as regards refugee protection and expresses support for:

– greater resettlement opportunities, especially for those who are more at risk and vulnerable;

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40. "UN Afghanistan donor conference raises $1 billion with crisis looming", News, DW, 13 September 2021.
41. EU – Afghanistan – Multimedia Centre (europa.eu) The EU's relationship with Afghanistan was guided by the 2017 EU Strategy for Afghanistan, aimed at strengthening the country's institutions and economy.
42. "First humanitarian flight to Kabul marks 'turning point' in crisis: WFP", UN News, 14 September 2021.
43. "UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific (RBAP) Bi-Weekly External Sitrep: Afghanistan Situation #5, as of 08 September 2021", Afghanistan, *ReliefWeb*, 10 September 2021.
44. Drought 2021, International Organization for Migration (iom.int).
45. Regional Preparedness and Emergency Plan for Afghan Refugees.
46. Justice and Home Affairs Council.

– the creation of complementary pathways such as humanitarian visas and a special visa programme for Afghan women seeking protection from the Taliban;

– the use of the Temporary Protection Directive and Civil Protection Mechanism.

54. In line with UNHCR's guidance, the EP also calls on EU member States to reassess current and recent asylum applications by Afghans in light of recent developments and calls against forced returns under any circumstances.

7. Human rights

55. The Taliban's return to power raises major concerns as regards the respect of human rights in Afghanistan. These concerns are twofold: that the progress which has been achieved in the past twenty years, especially in areas such as women's rights, is dismantled; and that the Taliban, even when holding *de facto* power, continue to pursue the same methods they used as an insurgent group, including summary and targeted killings,[48] torture, and other human rights and humanitarian law violations.

56. These concerns are well-founded. While in their public discourse, the Taliban have pledged to respect human rights – within the framework of Sharia law – the reality on the ground contradicts these statements, as reported by the United Nations, NGOs and media sources.[49]

57. Groups particularly at risk include:

– people who have worked for foreign troops and diplomatic missions – as interpreters, drivers, security officers or other civilian occupations;

– members of the Afghan security forces or Afghans who held political or administrative responsibilities;

– women and girls – the main issues concerning the right to education, freedom of movement, access to work, to health care and the right to participate in public and political life;

– children, some of whom are being recruited as child soldiers;[50]

– persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities;[51]

– journalists and human rights defenders.[52]

58. As the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, pointed out when opening a special session of the Human Rights Council devoted to Afghanistan, "Significant advances in the past two decades have given the people of Afghanistan a strong stake in a society that values and defends human rights. Civil society organisations have flourished across the country. Women have assumed public roles and leadership positions in the media and across society. In 2021, 27% of members of parliament and one fifth of civil servants were women. Some 3.5 million girls were attending schools – compared to 1999, when no girls could attend secondary school and only 9 000 were enrolled in primary education".[53]

59. Civil society has changed, and this is reflected in the street protests that followed the Taliban takeover. And yet, the question whether the Taliban have changed seems to call for a negative answer, judging by the way they are stifling criticism and demonstrations.

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47. Resolution on the situation in Afghanistan.
48. "UN has 'credible reports' of summary executions of civilians by Taliban", *Euronews*, 25 August 2021; "Afghanistan reports of torture and killing contradict Taliban's promises", Afghanistan, *The Guardian*, 21 August 2021.
49. Afghanistan: Taliban wasting no time in stamping out human rights says new briefing, FIDH.
50. Delivering for Afghanistan's children, UNICEF.
51. «Afghanistan: les grands perdants sont les minorités religieuses et ethniques non-pachtounes», *Le Figaro*, 25 August 2021 (*msn.com*); "Afghanistan's religious minorities live in fear of Taliban, brace for persecution", *NBC News*, 29 August 2021 (nbcnews.com).
52. "International Federation of Journalists expresses concern at safety of media persons in Afghanistan", *Al Arabiya Post*, 21 September 2021.
53. 31st Special Session of the Human Rights Council – The serious human rights concerns and situation in Afghanistan, OHCHR, 24 August 2021.

60. While the international community is unanimous in reaffirming "the importance of upholding human rights, including those of women, children and minorities",[54] two issues are still to be clarified:

– whether the international community will also be unanimous in making the engagement with the Taliban conditional upon the obligations which they have – as *de facto* authorities – in relation to the respect of human rights;

– what mechanisms will be in place to regularly and effectively monitor the Taliban's compliance with their obligations and hold them accountable in case of breaches.

61. As regards this latter issue, on 24 August 2021 the Human Rights Council "requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to present to the Human Rights Council, at its 48th session, an oral update on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, and to present to the Council, at its 49th session, a comprehensive written report focusing on, *inter alia*, the accountability of all perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses in the conflict, to be followed by an interactive dialogue".[55] A call from the UN Human Rights Commissioner and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commissioner, Shaharzad Akbar, to establish a specific, independent monitoring mechanism went unanswered.[56]

8. Terrorism

62. The issue of terrorism occupies a central place in the Doha Agreement. Under its terms, the Taliban committed to preventing any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies, namely by providing sanctuary, co-operation, or help with recruitment, training or fundraising.[57]

63. The United States, on the other hand, with the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, committed to initiate an administrative review of the US sanctions and rewards list against members of the Taliban with the goal of removing these sanctions by 27 August 2020 and to start diplomatic engagement with other members of the United Nations Security Council and Afghanistan to remove members of the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by 29 May 2020.[58]

64. The Taliban are not designated as a terrorist organisation either by the United Nations or the United States. Many prominent members of the Taliban, however, including several figures of the current interim government, are on the UN,[59] EU, US, UK[60] and other countries' sanction lists, involving assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo.

65. Soon after establishing itself, the Taliban interim government argued that the United States was in breach of the Doha Agreement and demanded that sanctions should be lifted.[61] This request concerns, amongst others, the Minister of the Interior, Sirrajudin Haqqani, who is accused of attacks against US forces in Afghanistan and for whom the United States has set a 5 million US$ Bounty.

66. The regular review of the UN sanction list is scheduled before the end of the year. The decision whether to wave the sanctions is another important dilemma to which the United States and the international community as a whole are confronted.

67. The latest UN report about the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan provides a snapshot of the presence of terrorist groups in the country.[62]

68. The report relates that large numbers of Al-Qaeda fighters and other foreign extremist elements aligned with the Taliban are located in various parts of Afghanistan and that Al-Qaeda and the Haqqani Network have close ties, based on ideological alignment, relationships forged through common struggle and intermarriage.[63]

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54. UNSC Resolution 2593 (2021).
55. A/HRC/RES/S-31/1, Desktop (*undocs.org*).
56. "The world must not abandon human rights in Afghanistan", View, *Euronews*, 7 September 2021.
57. Part Two of the Doha Agreement.
58. Part One D and E of the Doha Agreement.
59. Resolutions, United Nations Security Council; Narrative Summaries, United Nations Security Council.
60. UK sanctions relating to Afghanistan, GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).
61. "Taliban accuses the US of violating Doha Agreement", Taliban News, *Al Jazeera*, 9 September 2021.
62. Twelfth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2557 (2020) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2021/486, 1 June 2021.
63. Part C of S/2021/486.

69. The relation between the Taliban and ISIS-K, instead, remains one of rivalry, even if there is some degree of cross-over and defection between the two and assessments of the extent of ISIS-K's links with the Haqqani Network differ. This regional wing of Daesh, which take its name from the historical area known as the Khorasan Province, emerged in early 2015 from a break-away fringe of the Taliban. Unlike the Taliban, who pursue a national agenda and struggled for power in Afghanistan against occupying forces, ISIS-K aspires to realising a global Islamic caliphate.[64] Following a series of successive military setbacks, this group counts only a few thousand militants and uses bomb attacks against civilians in highly populated areas. According to media reports, the Taliban executed former ISIS-K leader Abu Omar Khorasani after they took over a Kabul lockup where he and several others were being held after arrests by government forces.[65]

70. Although the Taliban formally deny the presence of any foreign terrorist fighters, the UN report indicates that between 8 000 to 10 000 of them are present in the country, most of whom originate from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Pakistan, and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. Most of these foreign fighters are aligned with the Taliban, although others have also joined the ranks of Al-Qaeda and ISIS-K.[66]

71. An important question is to understand whether major regional and international players may converge with the Taliban towards the common interest of countering international terrorism, as the Taliban have declared on a number of occasions that their project concerns Afghanistan and that they do not seek to export their ideology beyond the borders of Afghanistan.

9. Drug trafficking

72. Opium poppy production and drug trafficking are a huge problem in Afghanistan and have represented the main source of financing for the Taliban since they were ousted in 2001. To give an idea of the numbers involved, the area under opium poppy cultivation increased by 37% from 2019 to 2020, with a potential opium production estimated at 6 300 tons.[67] For well over a decade, Afghanistan has been at the centre of the global illicit opiate trade, accounting for over 80% of global production.[68] There is increasing evidence also of the role of Afghanistan as a global producer and supplier of methamphetamines.[69]

73. "Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is driven by a multitude of factors. Rule of law related challenges, such as political instability, instability and insecurity caused by insurgency groups, have been found among the main drivers. Socio-economic factors also impact farmers' decisions, for example scarce employment opportunities, lack of quality education and limited access to markets".[70]

74. The Covid-19 pandemic does not appear to have had an impact on the three main trafficking routes from Afghanistan: the Balkan route, which supplies Western and Central Europe through Iran and Turkey via South-Eastern Europe; the southern route, through Pakistan and Iran to the Gulf region, Africa, South Asia and, to a lesser extent, South-East Asia, Oceania and North America; and the northern route, through Central Asia to the Russian Federation. In addition, the Caucasus branch of the routes appears to have remained a likely transit corridor for opiates to European markets. The seizure of Afghan heroin in Azerbaijan reportedly increased to 2 240 kg in 2020, compared to 802 kg in 2019.[71]

75. The issue of narcotics in Afghanistan has so far remained unaddressed in the talks with the Taliban even if it is one of the central obstacles in the efforts to bring peace, stability, security and economic development to the country and the wider region. It is also a security threat to Europe, as underlined by the Assembly in 2013.[72] It is no surprise, therefore, that the neighbouring countries and the Russian Federation are keen to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table also with a view to tackling narcotics production and trafficking,[73] and from recent talks it seems that the Taliban may be prepared to do so.[74] An additional point is also made with reference to economic sanctions as some observers argue, if maintained, that they would push the Taliban into resorting to drug trafficking as a source of income even further.[75]

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64. "The complex rivalry between Taliban and ISIS", *New York Post*, 27 August 2021 (*nypost.com*).
65. "Inside the Hidden War Between the Taliban and ISIS", *Wall Street Journal*, 26 August 2021.
66. S/2021/486.
67. Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020 – Executive Summary.
68. Overview (unodc.org).
69. Emerging evidence of Afghanistan's role as a producer and supplier of ephedrine and methamphetamine, *www.emcdda.europa.eu*.
70. Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020 – Executive Summary.
71. Ibidem
72. Assembly Resolution 1960 (2013) "Drug trafficking from Afghanistan as a threat to European security".
73. "Russia's Anti-Drug Crusade in Afghanistan", *The Diplomat*, 28 December 2017.

10. The regional dimension

76. Countries of the region are following developments in Afghanistan with great attention. They are the first ones to be concerned at the prospect of a continuation of violence or a descent into civil war. Similarly, they would be the first ones to suffer the consequences of an upsurge of terrorism, violent extremism, drug trafficking and other criminal activities in Afghanistan, which would have broader destabilising effects.

77. Neighbouring countries would be in the frontline should there be a large-scale arrivals of refugees; they are particularly concerned as they could be drawn into a challenging security situation owing to the presence of foreign fighters and kin ethnic groups involved in militia activities in Afghanistan.[76] Many of them are under strain because they have provided shelter to Afghans for decades.

78. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the last few months diplomatic dialogue has intensified with the organisation of dedicated meetings of regional organisations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and initiatives such as the Troika on Afghanistan – involving the Russian Federation, Pakistan and China – or the Moscow format.

79. From the output of these fora, it is evident that, while excluding formal recognition, the countries of the region support a pragmatic engagement with the Taliban. Their interests converge towards giving priority to the formation of an inclusive and representative government which would be a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. Some of them do not exclude the conditional delisting of some Taliban figures from UN sanctions[77] and are asking international financial institutions to unblock funding and assets that were frozen in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover.[78]

80. At the same time, the withdrawal of the United States and its disengagement from the central Asian theatre may have created new opportunities for regional powers to assert their political and economic influence. The first country that comes to mind is China which, as of 2020, was the main foreign investor in Afghanistan,[79] and has a keen interest in the country's natural riches – especially its deposits of rare earth minerals – and hopes to connect to Afghanistan, India and Pakistan through the massive infrastructure investment project of the Belt and Road Initiative.[80]

11. Conclusions

81. In the past twenty years, Council of Europe member States have heavily invested in Afghanistan, providing troops, humanitarian aid, financial support, advice, training and capacity building in an effort to create a stable, democratic, peaceful and secure country, free of terrorism and violent extremism. The withdrawal of the United States and its allies and the return to power of the Taliban have opened a new phase which is fraught with uncertainties and risks. Military withdrawal, however, should not translate into political withdrawal. The core values of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – which are enshrined in a number of universal standards, should serve as guidance in the policies on Afghanistan.

82. The first and foremost imperative for the international community should be tackling the dire humanitarian situation and preventing it from deteriorating further. To this end, Council of Europe member States should support the role of the United Nations as the leader and co-ordinator of humanitarian action. They should honour and even step up the financial pledges they have made, without requiring any conditionality for the provision of their support. If this was not to be the case, Afghans, rather than the regime in Afghanistan, would bear the brunt.

83. The crucial dilemma with which the international community is confronted is whether and how to engage with the Taliban. In fact, this issue is a litmus test for the capacity of the international community to send out a coherent message to the *de facto* authorities in Kabul. Cautious, pragmatic, operational

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74. Press release on consultations with a Taliban delegation, News, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (mid.ru)
75. "Opium: Afghanistan's drug trade that helped fuel the Taliban", *Aljazera*, 16 August 2021.
76. "The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Regional Responses and Security Threats", *ICCT*, 27 August 2021.
77. "Taliban can be removed from terrorist list only based on UNSC resolution — Russian envoy", *TASS*, 16 August 2021.
78. "China calls for end to sanctions on Afghanistan 'as soon as possible'", *South China Morning Post* (scmp.com), 23 September 2021.
79. "CHINA's main interests in AFGHANISTAN are of a strategic and political nature", *Defence-Point.com*, 21 August 2021.
80. "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative", Council on Foreign Relations (*cfr.org*).

engagement with the Taliban is the only way for the international community not to turn its back on Afghans. Without the Taliban's consent it would not be possible to reach out to the population to meet its needs; similarly, it would not be possible to continue the evacuation of foreign nationals and those thousands of Afghans who have worked with foreign countries and are still in Afghanistan.

84. It is clear from their statements and demands, such as their recent request to address the UN General Assembly,[81] that the Taliban are in search of international recognition. As an immediate step, dialogue, engagement and co-ordination are possible but should be made conditional upon their actions, namely the respect of human rights – including women's rights and the rights of minorities – and the rejection of terrorism, domestically and internationally. Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the monitoring of developments on the ground.

85. By exerting political leverage on the Taliban, Council of Europe member States should demand that the progress which has been made in the past twenty years in the field of human rights is not rolled back and promote a convergence of interests in the fight against terrorism. Furthermore, countering the production and trafficking of narcotics and other criminal activities should be part and parcel of the dialogue with the Taliban and the efforts aimed at stabilising Afghanistan and avoiding international spill-over effects.

86. The current crisis is bound to provoke further displacement, inside and outside Afghanistan. The conditions should be created for refugees to be provided safety and shelter within the region, in a spirit of solidarity. Notwithstanding, Council of Europe member States should shoulder their moral and legal responsibilities for refugee protection.

87. The pros and cons of using financial pressure to reinforce political leverage on the Taliban should be carefully weighted. Appropriate mechanisms should be found to avoid that such sanctions, freezing of assets and withholding of development aid aggravate the hardship already endured by the population and lead to an even greater reliance on criminal activities, with detrimental effects beyond the borders of Afghanistan.

88. In a recent address before the European Parliament, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrel captured in a sentence the multiple dimensions of the present situation: "If we want to look at Afghanistan after the end of August, we have to look at that from these three points of view: as the Afghan people tragedy, as the Western setback and, for the whole world, a change in international relations".[82]

89. These words should spur Council of Europe member States to analyse what happened in a self-critical way. They should open a constructive and forward-looking reflection on the place of Europe in the new possible geopolitical configuration and pull their weight to support dialogue, diplomacy and multilateralism, with a view to ensuring peace and stability.

81. "Taliban request to speak for UN General Assembly for New York to world leaders", *BBC News Pidgin*, 22 September 2021.
82. Afghanistan: Speech by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EP debate, European External Action Service (*europa.eu*).

Appendix 1 – Timeline

29 February 2020	The United States and the Taliban (the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) sign an Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan. This text sets out the drawdown of US and NATO troops within 14 months while the Taliban commits to engage in intra-Afghan negotiations in view of a political settlement and not to support terrorist groups either in or outside Afghanistan. As part of the Agreement, both sides commit to the liberation of prisoners according to a precise calendar and conditions. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United States commits to initiate a review of the US reward list and sanctions against Taliban members, and to start diplomatic engagement with other members of the UN Security Council with a view to removing Taliban members from the UN sanction list by May 2020.
	On the same day, the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan sign a Joint Declaration.
10 March 2020	The UN Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 2513 welcoming the Doha Joint Declaration and Agreement
14 April 2021	US President Joe Biden announces the complete withdrawal of US troops by 11 September
	NATO Allies decide to start withdrawing forces from the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan from 1 May 2021
April 2021	The Taliban launch an offensive in the southern province of Helmand, moving towards Gahzni and Kandahar. They capture the district of Nerkh, near Kabul
June 2021	Military clashes in 26 out of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. By 22 June, the Taliban extend their presence to the northern provinces.
July-August 2021	The Taliban military advance acquires a new momentum, bringing most districts and cities under their control. By mid-August only Kabul is left out of their rule.
15 August 2021	President Ashraf Ghani flees Afghanistan
	By this date, 17 600 people fleeing the Taliban from the rest of Afghanistan have arrived in Kabul
16 August 2021	The Taliban enter Kabul
	The US starts the evacuation of civilians from Kabul airport
	'Statement by the UN Security Council'
17 August 2021	Extraordinary meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers
23 August 2021	Extraordinary session of the CSTO dedicated to the situation in Afghanistan
24 August 2021	An extraordinary meeting of the G7 is held on Afghanistan. The final statement concludes that "The legitimacy of any future government depends on the approach it now takes to uphold its international obligations and commitments to ensure a stable Afghanistan".
	At a special session devoted to Afghanistan, the UN Human Rights Council adopts Resolution S/31/1 on Strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan
26 August 2021	A terrorist attack near Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul results in deaths and injuries of over 300 civilians and 28 military personnel
27 August 2021	The Taliban issue a statement condemning the terrorist attack
29 August 2021	A US drone attack targeting ISIS-K militants preparing a terrorist attack strikes a residential neighbourhood in Kabul. Subsequently an investigation confirms the death of 10 civilians as a result of the strike

30 August 2021	With 13 votes in favour with two abstentions (Russian Federation and China), the UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2593 (2021), condemning deadly attacks in Afghanistan and calling for combating terrorism and upholding human rights
	The US announces the complete withdrawal of its troops
31 August 2021	Extraordinary meeting on Afghanistan of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council
2-3 September 2021	Informal meeting of the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs discusses a possible EU presence in Kabul to co-ordinate the evacuation of remaining EU citizens
4 September 2021	Reopening of Kabul airport for civilian flights
5 September 2021	Martin Griffiths, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, meets the Taliban in Kabul
7 September 2021	The Taliban announce the formation of an interim government
9 September 2021	Briefing to the United Nations Security Council by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons
13-14 September 2021	In a United Nations Conference in Geneva, donors pledge 1.1 billion US dollars for humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan
14 September 2021	Resumption of UN humanitarian flights to Afghanistan
16 September 2021	The Summit of the CSTO in Dushanbe adopts a statement on Afghanistan calling *"on the international community to increase humanitarian aid to the Afghan population, confirms the intention of the CSTO member States to assist Afghanistan in becoming a peaceful, stable, prosperous country free of terrorism, war and drugs, and willingness to participate in international efforts to stabilize and develop Afghanistan under the central coordinating role of the UN"*
	The European Parliament adopts a Resolution on the situation in Afghanistan
17 September 2021	In its Resolution 2596 (2021), the UN Security Council renews UNAMA's mandate for six months until 17 March 2022
	Meeting of the SCO in Dushanbe
21 September 2021	The EU Council adopts Conclusions on Afghanistan
	High level representatives of the Troika on Afghanistan (Russian Federation, China and Pakistan) meet the Taliban in Kabul
22 September 2021	G20 Foreign Ministers' meeting on Afghanistan

Appendix 2 – Council of Europe member States having contributed troops to the NATO-led missions

Resolute Support (RSM), 2015-2021	**International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), 2001-2014**
Albania	Albania
Armenia	Armenia
Austria	Austria
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
Belgium	Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Czech Republic	Croatia
Denmark	Czech Republic
Estonia	Denmark
Finland	Estonia
Georgia	Finland
Germany	France
Greece	Georgia
Hungary	Germany
Italy	Greece
Latvia	Hungary
Lithuania	Iceland
Luxembourg	Ireland
Netherlands	Italy
North Macedonia	Latvia
Norway	Lithuania
Poland	Luxembourg
Portugal	Netherlands
Romania	North Macedonia
Slovakia	Norway
Slovenia	Poland
Spain	Portugal
Sweden	Romania
Turkey	Slovakia
Ukraine	Slovenia
United Kingdom	Spain
	Sweden
	Turkey
	Ukraine
	United Kingdom