



European Round Table

Event Report

“Prospects and Challenges of Building Afghanistan’s Future“

Thursday, 23 June 2011

European Parliament, Brussels

Altiero Spinelli Building (Room A8F388)

From 2:30pm to 5:30 pm

This Round Table was the eighth in a series of events organised by the Centre for European and International Policy (CEIPA). The Roundtable took place following the US President’s Obama speech to the nation “On the way forward in Afghanistan” delivered on 22 June 2011. To discuss the consequences of a gradual US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and the challenges lying ahead, CEIPA invited a group of highly competent representatives from governments, international organisations and civil society. Below are the summary and the main highlights of this event.



Mr. Peter von Bethlenfalvy, CEIPA Executive Director, who chaired the Round table started by thanking all participants for their interest in the CEIPA Round table. He then introduced the distinguished speakers, providing a brief CV of each of them in alphabetic order. He explained the reasons for the last minute change of the venue at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and expressed his warm gratitude to Sir Graham Watson, leading MEP and Mrs. Patsy Sorenson, former MEP and Payoke Director for enabling CEIPA to hold the Round table in the premises of the European Parliament. Mr. von Bethenfalvy recalled the US President Obama's speech of 22 June and its implications for the US and its ally's mission in Afghanistan and that region. The ultimate peace and beginning of new era in Afghanistan is depending on political settlement and successful transition of security responsibilities to the Afghan people.

Mr. Nicholas Williams, Head of Operations Section B (Afghanistan) at the NATO International Staff's Operations Division began his intervention by pointing out to the NATO's comprehensive approach and the mandate given by the UN to deploy forces in Afghanistan. The aim is to protect the Afghan people, counter insurgency, build capacity of the Afghan security forces and promote strong governance, while encouraging development of the country. The NATO-ISAF mission is the most extensive exercise set up to facilitate the implementation of these tasks. Its 2009 expansion to 40 000 additional US forces and some 7-10.000 from the allied countries was the result of the US General McChrystal's assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and his perception of the NATO's uncertain resolve. The purpose of the operation was to deny al Qaeda safe heavens in Afghanistan, reverse the Taliban momentum and train Afghanistan national security forces. All military reports suggest that the "surge" has achieved its objectives in terms of counterterrorism, the Taliban retreat and the Afghan security forces growth to over 100 000 troops. On 22 May 2011 President Karzai announced a gradual 18 months long transition of security from NATO troops to Afghan forces, scheduled to end with the withdrawal of foreign combat troops by 2014. Beyond this date NATO will continue building an enduring partnership based on cooperation that should last after the end of NATO combat operations. This long-lasting engagement with Afghanistan was decided by the NATO members at the Lisbon conference in 2010. The framework for providing practical and political support to the Afghan government after the transitional phase was agreed upon at the NATO ministerial meeting in Berlin in April 2011.

Mr. Christopher Davis, Minister Counsellor for Political Affairs at the US Mission to the EU started by recalling President Obama's announcement on 22 June 2011 to wind down the war and his pledge to continue working hard to keep the gains made, while transitioning responsibility for security to the Afghan government. The military and civilian surge succeeded in breaking the Taliban's momentum, enabling the beginning of this drawdown from a position of strength. Mr. Davis clarified that the aim of the intervention is to leave a stable Afghanistan, not a perfect state, but one able to defend itself from

challenges to its security. Improving governance, creating economic opportunities and supporting civil society are vital to solidify the military gains and advance the US political and diplomatic goals. To this aim the US has since January 2009 tripled the number of diplomats, development experts and civilian specialists on the ground and has expanded nearly six-fold its presence out in the field. Following the agreement reached at the NATO summit in Lisbon the US is working with the Afghans on a new Strategic Partnership Declaration that will provide a long term framework for bilateral cooperation beyond 2014. In addition to providing for the sovereign Afghan government this framework will also ensure that the terrorists continue to be targeted.

He went on to explain that the reconciliation talks with the Taliban and those who want to be part of a peaceful Afghanistan must be led by the Afghan government, under the following red line conditions: that they renounce violence, abandon al-Qaida and abide by the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women. Quoting Secretary of State Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Davis reiterated that the United States will not walk away from the region and will not repeat the mistakes of the past. The US will maintain its efforts to support the Afghanistan's reconstruction, economic development and strengthening of key institutions critical to ensuring that the transition leads to a long-term peace. With the transition process beginning this July the lead security forces responsibility will be transferred to the Afghan security forces in seven provinces and municipalities. It is anticipated that by the end of 2014 the Afghans will be fully in lead across the country. Mr. Davis concluded by underlying that the US do not seek any permanent American military bases in the country -or a presence that would be a threat to any of Afghanistan's neighbours- but hope to have a less intrusive presence that will allow the Afghan people to lead the steps necessary towards long term peace in their country.

HE, Homayoun Tandar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the EU, reiterated the importance of building the future of the country which is one among the least developed countries in the world. At the same time, according to the study conducted by the US Geological society, Afghanistan is very rich in natural resources, such as copper, iron and rare earth elements. Unleashing this potential necessitates attracting foreign investment and encouraging private sector development. Notably missing are European investors, which should be better informed and more involved in the process of reconstruction. The forthcoming high level conference in Bonn at the end of this year should be used to promote investment opportunities in Afghanistan and address investors' concerns about the infrastructure and security. In terms of the country's capacity building, Afghanistan has a shortage of qualified work force, hence the need for education and vocational training for young people who can bring about change. Foreign aid which creates a culture of dependency should be replaced by vocational training, education and the building of governance.

Mrs. Bettina Muscheidt, Desk Afghanistan at the European External Action Service, started by reiterating that the European Union, building on previous humanitarian assistance programmes, was providing substantial development

assistance to Afghanistan since 2001. Annual contributions under the EU's Development Cooperation Instrument now reached €200m with a focus on governance/Rule of Law, agriculture and health in addition to continued support under ECHO for humanitarian assistance. As Afghanistan's transition process has been formally launched particular attention is now on building government capacity in all sectors, including police training

EU assistance is guided by the Afghan National Development Strategy and the Kabul Process. In addition, the EU Action Plan of 2009 for Afghanistan and Pakistan aims at improving the coherence of the EU and Member States. However, the delivery of development assistance will depend on a number of factors, including the security situation and a broadly conducive institutional environment. In this context, it will be important for the Afghan Government to improve its accountability at all levels not only with respect to Afghan citizens but also in view of public opinion in the EU.

Afghanistan's rapidly growing workforce is not likely to find enough employment in the primary agricultural sector and, therefore, it will be important to look beyond for Afghanistan's economic development. Industrialisation and foreign investments could be part of a strategy aimed at absorbing a future educated Afghan work force. But for this strategy to succeed Afghanistan will need to improve its legal framework and justice institutions – a priority sector for the EU. Mrs. Muscheidt wended up her intervention by pointing out to the importance of the regional context, a field where the EU can play to its strengths. Notably, the EU provides support to integrated border management projects, helping inter alia also to rise tax revenues, improving the movement of goods and people while addressing security concerns.

Mrs. Shada Islam, Head of the Asia Programme at the Friends of Europe,

Mrs. Shada Islam, Head of the Asia Programme at the Friends of Europe, began by noting that public attention was shifting to the Arab spring and that in the coming months, policymakers would find it difficult to keep up the current level of commitment, funds and interest in the situation in Afghanistan. On Afghanistan, she identified three main issues relevant for the future 1) up to 2014 it will be pivotal to keep pressure on President Karzai, particularly with respect to security, building an Afghan army and the position of women. Are women going to be present at the upcoming Bonn conference? 2) Regarding NATO and the presence of Western forces, clearly some presence will be required beyond 2014. The fact that 70% of the Afghan economy at present depends on foreign aid is worrying and should be closely looked at. 3) In a long term future perspective, it will be crucial to empower civil society. Great strides have been made in the field of education but a lot still remains to be done. Building an army is important but the example of Pakistan shows that a strong army without civilian presence is not a good thing. We should seek to help building a country with an army not an army with a country. Empowering civil society and making it confident and independent, while promoting women entrepreneurship and supporting independent media are

part of the “soft” policy agenda that by no means should be forgotten. Touching upon the issue of regional context, Mrs. Islam pointed to the situation in Pakistan, where the weak civilian leadership is overshadowed by the strong army. She also, underlined that the thinking about a regional context should bring in India, Iran, Central Asia and increasingly China. Mrs. Islam concluded by saying that only coherent, consistent and sustained efforts would produce progress.

The question of regional cooperation was brought up during the ensuing **discussion**. The region will eventually have to settle down in order to enable all those with the stakes to have an impact (including China). Participants drawn parallels with the Balkan regional cooperation, pointing to the fact that the regional ownership encouraged progress and cooperation in several fields (particularly in the energy sector). At present though, only 5% of the Afghanistan economy account for the regional cooperation. Economic complementarities are for now more an issue of conflict than cooperation. Here again, civil society cooperation should be encouraged. The more non-governmental actors get together in the regional context the better. It was noted that the EU made an important contribution to the development of civil society, providing for its growth and space to operate. Participants reiterated the importance of sustainability over progress, expressing hope that the reconciliation will bring more stable environment and thus less dependence on the foreign aid. To spur development and create a climate of innovation, business people should be brought together. Regarding the role of media it was said that the Afghanistan legislation is surprisingly free but it is nibbled at all corners. By safeguarding the freedom of media we can achieve checks and balances. However, we need signals from the Afghan society that they are receptive to the checks and balances. Big hindrance to sustainable peace is the unresolved question of impunity. Addressing this issue is a prerequisite for reconciliation, lasting peace and solid democratic foundations of future Afghan society. The issue of drug production was also raised in the context of its impact on the Afghan economy and as a matter of public health threat.

In conclusion **Mrs. Patsy Sorensen, Payoke Executive Director** has drawn attention to the problem of trafficking. She reiterated the potential of empowering women in the Afghanistan society and reminded about the progress made in this respect, drawing parallel with Syria, where the situation of women is more precarious. Also important is the need for communication, to give more prominence to the positive achievement which could create better circumstances for exchange, cooperation and foreign investment.

Mr. Peter von Bethlenfalvy, CEIPA Executive Director winded up the discussion by thanking the speakers and all participants for their valuable contributions. He closed the Round table by extending his thanks to Mr. Frank Felix for the successful and valuable cooperation over the past year and a half and expressed hopes for the future CEIPA cooperation with the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.