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## The European Union's strategy on Afghanistan. Selected Issues<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The attack on the World Trade Center of September 11, 2001 evidenced a growing terrorist threat to the US, as well as to the European Union. It is not surprising then that the EU started to combat terrorism abroad. Afghanistan posed such a large threat that the European community decided to actively participate in the war with the Taliban, and then in a peace mission in that area. The article analyzes the evolution of the European Union's commitment to helping Afghanistan, democratization, reconstruction of the country and its structures, creation of civil society and improvement of the quality of life. The tenets of the latest EU strategy for Afghanistan in 2017 are also considered, which put the strongest emphasis on the issues of respect for human rights, increasing the role of women in social life and ensuring peace and stability in the region.

**Key words:** Afghanistan, stability, strategy, European Union, democracy, human rights, security, Taliban European Union's strategy on Afghanistan

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The European Union and its member states cooperate with the Afghan government, parliament and civil society in many fields. The development of agriculture and rural areas is supported, standards of medical care are raised, the quality of food has visibly improved and the degree of democratization of social life has increased. For years, efforts to enhance respect for human rights, mainly of women and children, have been strongly promoted. Importantly, women's role in politics has been increasing (currently, they occupy 27 percent of seats in the parliament). According to the report by the European Parliament published in March 2019, 57 percent of Afghans had access to basic health care in 2018 (com-

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pared to only 9 percent of the population in 2001) and the average life expectancy had increased from 44 to 60 years. Over seventeen years, the number of people enrolled in schools increased tenfold, and 39 percent of students are women (*European Union and Afghanistan sign Cooperation...*).

The aim of this article is to present the European Union's (EU) activities towards Afghanistan, in particular to analyze the new strategy and identify the most important areas in which the European community supports Afghanistan. This will make it possible to determine progress in the implementation of this strategy, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, and to answer the research questions of how has the EU engaged in helping Afghanistan, what was the reason for this involvement, which areas of life have been given most attention, what have the outcomes been, and how have subsequent EU strategies for the development of Afghanistan evolved?

The research methods employed for this purpose include, among others, the comparative, systemic and genetic explanation methods. The source basis of the article is provided primarily by documents and reports on EU strategy towards Afghanistan.

### Historical overview

In October 1994, a new political and military force emerged in the internally conflicted Afghanistan – the Taliban (from the Arabic *talib* – disciple, student). Their presence and growing power was demonstrated to the world one month later. On October 29, a convoy of thirty trucks left Quetta in Pakistan. They were to take food, medicines and industrial goods to Turkmenistan. In this way, a new direction in Pakistani foreign policy was to be symbolically initiated; another purpose was to check whether permanent automobile communication between Pakistan and Central Asian republics could be started, thereby facilitating business contacts. However, on November 2, the convoy was attacked 35 kilometers away from Kandahar. Less than twenty-four hours later, the Taliban liberated the trucks, marched on Kandahar, and conquered the city in the following hours. The movement, consisting mainly of young men, most often representatives of the Pashtun ethnic group, quickly grew in strength: by the end of 1994 there were about 12,000 of them, and by February 1995 this number doubled. They had two hundred tanks, six transport helicopters and twelve MiG-23 jets (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2010, pp. 395–396).

The Taliban's goal was to create an Islamic state in Afghanistan which would follow religious principles and guidelines in every respect. Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, Acting Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Taliban government, did not hide their intentions: "We want to take away the weapons that are in the hands of the people of Afghanistan. We want to finally establish a strong government complying with the precepts of Islam" (Klewiec, 1996). To this end, the Taliban had to take over. This was accomplished with further military victories, initiated by the aforementioned capture of Kandahar, (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2010, p. 397).

Between September 13 and 22, 1996, the Taliban conquered Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar. From a strategic point of view, the key events took place on the night of September 24/25, when Taliban forces captured the city of Sarobi, which is the gateway to the capital, located less than 70 kilometers away. Kabul was taken over two days later. After the city was captured, the Taliban stormed into the United Nations building and apprehended the former President of Afghanistan, Najibullah. Having been beaten up and emasculated, he was hanged in front of the presidential palace (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2010, pp. 398–399). By 2001, the Taliban had seized 90 percent of the entire country, which was increasingly suffering from terrorism. The presence of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, who was suspected of participating in the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, triggered the US intervention in this area (footage of *President George W. Bush Speech*, AP Archive, 2015).

### **The European Union towards Afghanistan**

In 1951, the European Coal and Steel Community was established, initiating the unification tendencies in Western Europe after the end of World War Two. Integration was sought also in the field of politics and defense. Negotiations did not bring the expected results, which changed only in the mid-1980s, after the United States announced the Strategic Defense Initiative. The initiative mobilized the authorities in Europe to take action on their own independent defense system. Under the Treaty on European Union signed in Maastricht in 1992, the Common Foreign and Security Policy was established, demonstrating the intention of the European community to be independent in the area of security and defense, thanks to which Europe would no longer be dependent on the help from the United States (Antczak, 2011, pp. 21–22).

Without a doubt, the issue of Afghanistan is one of the most complex security problems at the international level, which involves a broad, international community. The situation is not made any easier by the complicated history of this country and the scale of problems faced by its inhabitants. In order to broaden the knowledge about Afghanistan, numerous meetings and conferences are organized at the political level (among others for the reconstruction of infrastructure, for education, improvement of health and the state of the economy), and more and more expert studies are prepared. Significant financial resources are allocated to preventing the state from further drowning in the swamp of extremism, and engaging in conflicts. For example, during a conference in Tokyo in January 2002, the foreign ministers of 61 countries worldwide (including representatives of Japan, the United States, Saudi Arabia and the European Union), alongside 21 international organizations, decided to transfer \$1.8 billion to restore Afghanistan (Arzo, 2010, pp. 192–195). Cooperation aimed at developing and establishing peace and security in the regions of disruption and global crises has been one of the fundamental fields of activity of the European Union from its establishment to today (Fazilyar, 2016, pp. 73–75).

### **The presence of the European Union in Afghanistan: in search of peace and development**

In 2001, Afghanistan presented the world with the worst case of a failed state. Under the Taliban, it was a paradise for terrorists and the world's largest producer of drugs. The country posed the most serious threat to peace and security in the world. After the September 11 events, NATO military forces attacked Afghanistan, which eventually led to the collapse of the Taliban government. The international community, especially Western countries, felt obliged to restore and ensure security and stability there. The European Commission has played a significant role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The EU continues to provide the largest humanitarian aid. The Commission has also published two documents – for the periods of 2003–2006 (*Country Strategy Paper: Afghanistan 2003–2006: including national indicative programme*) and of 2007–2013 (*Country Strategy Paper: Afghanistan 2007–2013*) – addressing the issues of security and internal stability of Afghanistan (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2010, p. 423).

Support from the European Union includes also military and technical training, strengthening the structures of institutions that uphold human rights, and promoting the development of civil society in Afghanistan (Fazilyar, 2016, pp. 78–79).

The activity of the European community, and then the EU in Afghanistan, dates back to the 1980s. However, it was not until 2001 that the EU became involved in specific actions in Afghanistan aimed at ensuring its security, stability, reconstruction and democratization. At the first international conference on Afghanistan, in Bonn in 2001, the European Commission allocated €4.93 million (Hołdak, 2007, p. 187) to the Rapid Reaction Mechanism. The aim was to support the political changes under way and extend the control of the new Afghan authorities over the territory of the state. In May 2002, the second aid program was adopted, to strengthen the credibility of the Provisional Administration of Afghanistan among the public and to prepare democratic elections (presidential, parliamentary and regional). At the international conferences in Tokyo in 2002, and in Berlin two years later, the EU and its member states offered a total of around €3.1 billion in financial aid, which accounted for almost 30 percent of global financial aid for the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan and its development in 2002–2006 (Ibid., p. 187). In the following years, the European Union allocated almost €2 billion for the reconstruction and democratization of Afghanistan – as part of the so-called Afghanistan Compact. The implementation of cooperation, and control over the correctness of the way the funds transferred were spent, was vested in the Special Representative, appointed in December 2001 (*Country Strategy Paper: Afghanistan 2007–2013*).

The current framework for the European Union's involvement in helping Afghanistan is established in several documents. In 2014, most countries completed their participation in the mission. After this event, the first conclusions agreed at the level of the European community were adopted in July 2016 by the Council composed of foreign ministers. On February 18, 2017, an agreement was signed between the EU and Afghanistan on cooperation for partnership and development. It confirms the EU's commitment to the development of this country in Central Asia during the so-called decade of transformation (2015–2024). The agreement determines the framework for support from the EU and provides for the following:

- regular political dialogue for the protection and promotion of human rights and the creation of civil society (Articles 4–6 of the *Coopera-*

*tion Agreement 2017*), as well as for building peace and strengthening international security (*Ibid.*);

- development of economic cooperation and cooperation for development (*Ibid.*), among others, thanks to the mutual granting of most-favored-nation clause and increasing EU investment in Afghanistan;
- cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs, aimed at strengthening the judiciary and police forces and at combating organized crime and irregular migration (*Ibid.*).

The third document which specifies the principles and manifestations of the EU's engagement in Afghanistan is constituted by the conclusions to the new strategy towards Afghanistan adopted in October 2017 by the EU and confirming its involvement in this area. By principle, the EU focuses on the economic development of the state, democratization and internal stability. Peace, security and development are the most important and interlinked challenges forming the foundation for the new strategy (*Afghanistan – Council conclusions*, October 16, 2017).

### **EU development aid for Afghanistan**

The EU development program is based on the principles of effectiveness. For example, close coordination between development aid and increasing its public service capability is a priority. In October 2016, during the Brussels conference, the EU signed an agreement with the Afghan government to rebuild the country. By 2020, the international community will have supported Afghanistan to the amount of \$15.2 billion, of which the EU alone will provide over \$5.5 billion. Coordinating activities with other international actors, the EU will help the Afghan government to combat corruption, generate economic growth, reduce poverty and strengthen democratic institutions (*Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017–2021*).

The key element facilitating the implementation of reforms is full transparency on the part of Afghanistan. International bodies want to be sure that the funds transferred are spent in an appropriate manner. In October 2018, the European Commission introduced its own multiannual program for Afghanistan (2014–2020), which provides for the transfer of €1.4 billion by 2020. Around €200 million has been allocated to the development and reform of agriculture, which is a key sector for the economy. Other important areas of EU assistance to Afghanistan include also pu-

blic security, health security, police training, law enforcement, and gender equality (Ibid.).

Table 1  
EU aid to Afghanistan 2002–2016 (EUR million)

| Year         | Commitments     | Disbursements   |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 2002         | 247.59          | 151.04          |
| 2003         | 285.55          | 213.90          |
| 2004         | 247.55          | 171.19          |
| 2005         | 224.48          | 206.11          |
| 2006         | 200.53          | 175.98          |
| 2007         | 195.90          | 224.59          |
| 2008         | 214.49          | 213.27          |
| 2009         | 269.83          | 285.65          |
| 2010         | 254.61          | 215.20          |
| 2011         | 347.00          | 261.41          |
| 2012         | 283.61          | 199.63          |
| 2013         | 316.86          | 188.41          |
| 2014         | 297.90          | 270.50          |
| 2015         | 275.00          | 173.00          |
| 2016         | 362.00          | 268.00          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>4,022.90</b> | <b>3,217.88</b> |

**Source:** Fact sheet, EU-Afghanistan relations, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/2017-07-24\\_eu\\_afghanistan\\_relations\\_factsheet\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/2017-07-24_eu_afghanistan_relations_factsheet_en_0.pdf), March 24, 2018.

The following have been considered the most important elements of the new strategy:

- 1) supporting peace, stability and security in the region;
- 2) strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights and promoting good governance and empowering women;
- 3) supporting economic and social development.

The success of any activity aimed at democratization, stabilization and development in Afghanistan depends on ensuring peace and security within the state, and in the region. This is primarily about the elimination of threats from rebel and terrorist groups. In pursuit of these goals, the European Union and its member states have recognized the necessity of close cooperation with the UN and NATO. Importantly, it has been stated that the main responsibility for peace and security lies with the Afghan authorities and the governments of neighboring states, therefore the EU should support regional and international peace initiatives, including the

Kabul Process (*Afghanistan – Council conclusions*, October 16, 2017). The EU is also to support the activities of the High Peace Council and to guard the implementation of the peace agreement between the Afghan government and Hezb-e-Islami.

The first conference under the Kabul Process was attended by representatives of 27 countries and international organizations. The government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan decided to conduct the Kabul Process because this made it possible to intensify and accelerate efforts to ensure security and conduct the peace process in the country (*Security Council Press Statement on Kabul Process*, 2018, United Nations).

Promoting peace and security is not only about combating the terrorist threat and rebel groups, but also about attempting to counteract organized crime, especially drug trafficking and money laundering. Afghanistan is one of the largest drug producers and exporters in the world, therefore combating these operations is one of the priorities for the Afghan government.

According to the United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs (UNODC), the production of illicit substances on such a large scale is the outcome of widespread corruption in state institutions and increased uncertainty associated with ongoing military operations. At the same time, the UNODC emphasizes that the current situation could be improved depending mainly on the intentions and real actions taken by state institutions (*Worldwide Report on Drugs 2017*).

The fight against corruption is therefore also essential. To this end, the EU has committed itself to training police forces and judicial authorities (using EUPOL's experience) and to helping to develop a nationwide anti-corruption strategy. The EUPOL began operations on June 15, 2007. It is a civilian mission within the Common Security and Defense Policy, supporting reforms launched by the government of Afghanistan to create a civilian police service respecting the rule of law and human rights in its operations. Activities under EUPOL are mainly carried out by police units and by experts in the field of the rule of law, seconded by EU member states (*Misja policyjna UE w Afganistanie*, 2015, p. 12).

The second element of the EU's strategy towards Afghanistan is acting for democratization, strengthening the rule of law and upholding human rights. Human rights are not well established, especially for women and children. The applicable law in this respect is not observed, especially upcountry. This is due to the weakness of state institutions, ubiquitous corruption, and the lack of transparency in administrative



and court procedures. A serious problem is the so-called culture of impunity, whereby the perpetrators of violations of human rights are not punished.

The European Union recognizes the introduction of true guarantees of freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of the media as challenges in the area of democratization, the rule of law and human rights. It is a priority for the EU to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty and the elimination of torture and other inhumane treatment or punishment in Afghanistan (*Afghanistan – Council conclusions*, October 16, 2017).

In pursuit of the objectives set out in the new strategy, the EU has committed itself to conducting training for employees of investigatory and judicial bodies, as well as to strengthening bodies and organizations dealing with the protection of human rights. Special support is also offered to the Afghan Human Rights Commission.

Specific commitments of the European Union in the field of democratization include supporting initiatives in the field of civic education, including education regarding the importance of elections (especially among women and vulnerable social groups). It is also about supporting the main electoral bodies and consultancy in the field of preparation of regulations and resolving potential election disputes. The EU has also declared its willingness to participate in international commissions as observers during voting (*European Union and Afghanistan sign Cooperation*, 2017).

The third element of the European Union's new strategy towards Afghanistan is to support economic and social development. Although progress has been made in economic and social development in Afghanistan, the conditions of economic activity remain unstable, and shortages in infrastructure are noticeable. Afghanistan still has one of the lowest rates of social development in the world: 36 percent of Afghan citizens live in poverty. Almost two-thirds of Afghans are illiterate and around 40 percent are unemployed. Poverty intensified with the influx of Afghans returning from neighboring countries, after the period of seeking refuge, caused first by Taliban rule and later by military conflict. Poverty is also caused by climate change and natural disasters (*UN: 39% of Afghans live below the poverty line*, dari.wadsam.com).

The EU considers support for the private sector and the strengthening of agriculture, also through improving its resistance to climate change, to be key for economic development. Due to the rich natural resources in

the country, it is also important to rebuild industry. This will create new jobs, reducing unemployment and raising national income levels. The EU has committed itself to increasing economic cooperation and trade. The increase in trade, also in the regional dimension, should lead to economic and political stabilization. Involving international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the European Investment Bank serves the same purpose (*Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017–2021*).

### **Current situation in Afghanistan**

In 2019, eighteen years passed since international bodies arrived in Afghanistan to help in the reconstruction of the state. What is the internal situation now?

The aid provided by the international community has proved effective in some sectors, such as health or rural development. Unfortunately, there is a dramatic discrepancy between what the international community has designed for Afghanistan and what is actually happening there. Despite high financial outlays and a large number of military personnel (e.g. trainers, experts), international organizations and Afghan companies have not been able to ensure even a reasonable, minimal level of security and the developmental needs of the country. The statistics of various international organizations are unambiguous. The money spent has had little effect on the development of Afghanistan in some areas. The following examples are the most important:

- a) ubiquitous corruption; in the ranking of Transparency International dealing with combating corruption, in 2018 Afghanistan ranked fourth among the most corrupt countries in the world. It is worth noting that the situation was better two years earlier (eighth position in the ranking) (*Corruption Perception Index 2018*). Corruption has been among the main challenges facing the Afghan government and the international community. The Afghan government emphasizes its good intentions and efforts to fight this practice. The lack of success in this area is also one of the reasons for the failure in combating terrorism. Due to the lack of a rational and targeted approach, part of the international aid and most of the support programs have been wasted. A sense of insecurity and widespread uncertainty among people and the instability of the Afghan government and the entire country, accidents and ter-

rorist attacks in various parts of Afghanistan, including in the capital, remain a serious problem and a reason for people fleeing the state.

- b) growing production of drugs; Afghanistan remains the world's largest producer and exporter of drugs. The United Nations found out that the production of opium in Afghanistan in 2017 increased by 87 percent compared to the previous year, and the area of cultivation in the country increased significantly (*United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2017*).

### Conclusions and prospects

For many years, Afghanistan has been struggling with the problem of the increasingly powerful drug industry. Wars, instability of authorities, corruption and poverty contribute to maintaining an upward trend. Despite the attempts to combat this phenomenon undertaken by central authorities in cooperation with Western forces, it cannot be effectively resolved. The participation of Taliban rebels in this field is considerable, who have made the trade in illegal substances into a very profitable business that helps them to achieve their established military goals (*Afghanistan opium survey 2017*, UNODC).

The permanent crisis that affects Afghanistan has caused irreversible damage to most of the country, as well as to other countries in the region. This region faces threats stemming from the wave of political violence, terrorism, separatism and extremism. To neutralize this danger, it is imperative that the countries of the region and the international community work together to create a safe and stable Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, only a stable and internally strong Afghanistan, which is the heart of Asia, will have a positive impact on the whole of the region, increasing the level of trust and strengthening the development of trade, including transcontinental trade.

The new EU strategy announced for Afghanistan emphasizes that security and the economic situation in the state are more fragile than in recent years, and the Taliban have a lot to say, fighting government forces in various parts of the country (*Afghanistan: new EU strategy*).

The most important elements in this strategy include good governance, implementation of the democratic state of law, ensuring social justice, the rule of law and peace and stability, promoting human rights and growth and improving the economic situation of Afghan women (*Ibid.*).

The EU has demonstrated that it understands the difficult and dangerous conditions in Afghanistan. Once again, the EU has proved that it

supports the Afghan government and nation. It stresses that continuing international cooperation with Afghanistan is absolutely necessary. The EU also calls for an effective and sustainable peace plan to be created.

The European Union is certainly a serious actor in international relations and will undoubtedly continue to play an important role in the peace and stability process in the world. Using soft diplomacy tools, including prevention, it stands a great chance of playing the role of a mediator between the parties in the conflict. It is also possible that the EU will form a number of coalitions, especially with the United States, to combat terrorism (Antczak, 2011, p. 96).

Given the fact that predicting phenomena – especially ones as dynamic as those discussed above – is extremely difficult, it is also difficult to judge what the future of Afghanistan will be. It is true that good will and efforts can be seen on both sides (Afghanistan and the EU), but the result of other factors (such as the recent immigration crisis in Europe, which is not over yet) can easily cause a shift of priorities. It is worth remembering, however, that contemporary international relations are a system of communicating vessels. The situation in Afghanistan is not without influence on what is happening in other regions of the world.

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## **Strategia Unii Europejskiej wobec Afganistanu. Wybrane problemy**

### **Streszczenie**

Zamach na World Trade Center z 11 września 2001 roku był dowodem na zwiększające się zagrożenie terrorystyczne dla USA, ale również dla Unii Europejskiej. Nie dziwi zatem, że UE zaczęła walczyć z terroryzmem również poza jej własnym obszarem. Afganistan stanowił na tyle duże zagrożenie, że wspólnota europejska zde-

cydowała się na czynny udział najpierw w wojnie z talibami, a następnie w misji pokojowej na tamtym terenie. Artykuł pozwala prześledzić ewolucję zaangażowania Unii Europejskiej w pomoc Afganistanowi, w sprawę demokratyzacji, odbudowy kraju i jego struktur, stworzenia społeczeństwa obywatelskiego oraz poprawę jakości życia. Pochylono się też nad zapisami najnowszej strategii UE dla Afganistanu z 2017 roku, która najsilniejszy nacisk kładzie na kwestie przestrzegania praw człowieka, zwiększenia roli kobiet w życiu społecznym oraz zapewnieniu pokoju i stabilności w regionie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Afganistan, stabilizacja, strategia, Unia Europejska, demokracja, prawa człowieka, bezpieczeństwo, talibowie