Council conclusions on Afghanistan

FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting
Luxembourg, 24 June 2013

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The European Union remains firmly committed to supporting state-building and long-term development in Afghanistan.

2. In order to establish the appropriate framework for future cooperation, the Council calls on the Government of Afghanistan to finalize negotiations rapidly on the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development (CAPD). The text should fully reflect Afghanistan's international obligations.

3. The EU continues to be concerned at the overall security situation in Afghanistan. The EU condemns the indiscriminate attacks on Afghan civilians and the specific targeting of humanitarian aid organizations by insurgent groups.

4. The EU welcomes the announcement of the final tranche of the transition process on 18 June, recognizing the increased competence and effectiveness of the Afghan National Security Forces. For its part, the EU will continue to support Afghan efforts to strengthen civilian policing and the rule of law during transition and the decade of transformation.

5. Following the Council's decision to extend the EU's police mission EUPOL AFGHANISTAN until the end of 2014, strategic planning and programming for comprehensive EU action to support Afghan efforts in strengthening civilian policing and rule of law post 2014 will be taken forward. It should pursue a viable strategy that, drawing on all instruments and modalities, promotes an Afghan-owned sustainable approach to policing and the rule of law and reflects the priorities set out in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) and the CAPD. Close coordination with NATO will be ensured.
6. The EU will continue to support an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process on the basis of the principles set out in the Bonn Conference Conclusions of December 2011. Lasting peace in Afghanistan will require an inclusive political settlement respecting the Afghan Constitution, including the rights of women, and comprising all national, regional and international stakeholders. The opening of a political office in Doha for the purpose of peace negotiations with authorised representatives of the Taliban is an important step. But there will be many further challenges along the way. The EU calls on all political forces in Afghanistan to support the peace process, and on the countries in the region to use their influence on parties to the conflict in Afghanistan to urge participation in substantive peace negotiations.

7. The EU welcomes the progress made in the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation. The EU reiterates that developing mechanisms of regional cooperation with participation of Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries can play an important role in promoting regional stability. The EU welcomes the confidence building measures adopted during the Ministerial Conference in Almaty and will provide support to those concerning trade facilitation, disaster risk reduction and counter-narcotics.

8. The TMAF remains a valid central political agreement stipulating the required steps the Government of Afghanistan needs to take to improve economic and political governance, both to put in place the fundamental measures for continued progress in Afghanistan and to benefit from the full extent of the international aid pledges made in Tokyo. Electoral reforms, financial transparency, revenue generation, progress on human rights, in particular the rights of women, and the rule of law remain paramount for achieving long term transformation in Afghanistan. The EU therefore calls on Afghanistan to make progress in the implementation of agreed commitments, with a view to a joint assessment which will be discussed at the Senior Officials’ Meeting planned on 3 July in Kabul. The EU will promote further donor coordination and concerted international action when implementing this framework, with a view to ensuring that the TMAF is applied in an effective manner when taking decisions regarding assistance.

9. In the longer term, the EU and Member States will look to adopt a Joint Programming approach that will further strengthen coordination and results.

10. The EU will continue to support the preparation for presidential and provincial elections in April 2014 and parliamentary elections in 2015. The EU believes that the elections must be inclusive, transparent and credible in order that the outcome is accepted as legitimate by the people of Afghanistan. These elections will be a critical signal for many in both Afghanistan and the international community of the progress made in consolidating democracy and rule of law. The EU calls upon all parties in Afghanistan, including the Government and the Parliament, to ensure that the legal framework for the elections is in place. It is particularly important that the Independent Election Commission (IEC) is widely accepted as impartial, that a credible electoral complaints mechanism is agreed upon, that robust and effective fraud prevention mechanisms are put in place and that comprehensive security planning for the elections is undertaken. The EU encourages the Government of Afghanistan to appoint a new IEC chairperson through a transparent and consultative process.
11. The EU will continue to support reform efforts to foster the economic growth necessary for increased fiscal sustainability and the creation of jobs. In particular, the Government of Afghanistan needs to do more to stimulate the agricultural sector, which will be the engine for economic growth in the short-term and will continue to be the main source of employment for Afghans, as well as being vital for food security. Reforms are needed to improve the climate for potential investors, such as the approval of the Mining Law.

12. The full implementation of the reforms recommended by the international financial institutions is essential for the country's development, including systemic action to tackle corruption and improve the transparency and management of public funds.

13. The EU remains concerned about the human rights situation in Afghanistan. The EU calls on the Government of Afghanistan to take urgent action to address the unconstitutional position of the Chief Justice. Wider judicial reform is necessary to better implement the statutory measures concerning the rights of women, including the Eliminating Violence Against Women Law, and to improve their access to justice. The EU notes the appointment of new commissioners for the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). Reconciliation and reintegration would be facilitated by the publication of the AIHRC's report concerning human rights abuses committed between 1978 and 2001.

14. The EU continues to prioritize efforts to combat drug production and trafficking, and irregular migration. The issue of counter-narcotics should be addressed through coordination of efforts on interdiction, alternative livelihoods and other relevant measures, including support to the health sector.

15. With a view to defining the EU's strategic engagement with Afghanistan post 2014, the Council will hold a debate in the second half of 2013 on the role of the EU in Afghanistan in the coming years, in light of the evolving situation and the above objectives. This should lead to the development of a new strategy in place of the 2009 Action Plan that is aligned with the strategic thinking of the Government of Afghanistan, identifies deliverable objectives and timelines, and sets out a clear division of labour. The strategy should be ready for endorsement by mid-2014.

16. The Council welcomes the nomination of Mr. Franz-Michael S. Mellbin as EU Special Representative for Afghanistan and thanks Mr. Vygaudas Usackas for his outstanding service as EUSR.