

## REPORT ON AN EUISS EXPERT MEETING

# Afghanistan — new approaches towards stabilisation

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### 1. Introduction

The US-led armed operation in Afghanistan, which is now being extended to Pakistan, has not succeeded in supporting the extension of the authority of the Afghan Government to the entire territory of Afghanistan, as proclaimed by the International Security Assistance Force's mandate. In a rather fragmented fashion, over 40 countries contributing to ISAF have deployed small numbers of troops and just a few civilians within over 20 structures spread out in the country, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). NATO provides a soft coordination umbrella for these national contributions outside the US Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), whereas the UN civilian integrated mission has been sidelined to a great extent.

For eight years now, the international community has either supported or at least not opposed a military-driven implementation of a complex strategy that was confirmed in the Afghan Compact (London, 2006). Under a strong OEF leadership, the pre-eminence of traditional security and territorial control operations has significantly jeopardised the human security and governance dimensions of the consensual strategy. Since these three components of stability are believed to be equally important, the current situation in Afghanistan only proves that the London strategy was not necessarily wrong.

The new American administration has devised a revised strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The revision incorporates some new terminology, mediation and regionalisation being at the forefront, while keeping the focus on a military victory over al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. According to most experts, there is, however, a perception of more flexibility on

the US side to discuss and implement such strategy. The EU, for its part, has not found common ground in Afghanistan, although it managed to launch a relatively small non-executive mission for police training in 2006. Some experts have consistently urged the EU to devise a coherent strategy, which is a difficult but necessary task.

On 4 May 2009, the EUISS gathered an extensive group of experts and officials from countries neighbouring Afghanistan, as well as from Turkey, India, China and the EU, in order to analyse whether there is or could be a genuine regional strategy or regional approach in order to stabilise Afghanistan; what linkages and implications can be identified between the situation in Afghanistan and the extension of military operations to Pakistan; and to what extent mediation and reconciliation are possible within Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistani regions. The three-step approach of narrowing down the geographical focus proved fruitful, leading to a very intense, stimulating debate, some of the main points of which are summarised below.

It is fair to state in advance that consensus was not reached on most crucial issues – opinions of participants varied even on whether or not a consensual vision had been achieved regarding certain aspects – but some antagonistic views were to some extent reconciled during the discussions. It should also be borne in mind – as one of the participants recalled – that the volatile environment of the region means that any expert analysis can quickly be rendered outdated. Finally, it should be noted that experts attending the meeting spoke as much of their country of origin as they did of others, thus it would be completely misleading to attribute opinions on this basis.

## 2. Regional strategy or regional kaleidoscope?

The renewed commitment of the new American Administration to Afghanistan and the extension of its policy to Pakistan were welcomed by some experts in as much as it could enhance cooperation in the region and beyond. It was stressed that the end of American unilateralism, which had already entailed the launching of a regional dialogue and the announcement of a reinforcement of civilian capabilities, was in fact a precondition for resolving the situation in Afghanistan and now also in Pakistan.

The general call to all neighbouring states to cooperate more efficiently, the extension of the US counter-insurgency strategy to Pakistan and the involvement of the Pakistani Army in that operation are so far the main indications of a 'broader' approach to the situation in Afghanistan. The prospects of a truly regional strategy towards the prevailing state of affairs in Afghanistan are not high, though. As the discussion reflected, there is no consensus on whether such an approach exists beyond paper or whether it is possible at all.

Neighbouring countries look at Afghanistan from very different perspectives, which are well rooted in their respective political cultures and which tend to be rather axiomatic. Most governments if not all of them put forward a general prescription for stability in Afghanistan, but in practical terms the views and perceptions are very different, in some cases bilateral problems being in fact projected onto Afghanistan, which could aggravate regional tensions. It was even said during the discussions that the prevailing trend in the region is to concentrate on problems rather than on solutions.

Among the most relevant general points made by the experts are the following:

- ♦ Although the region was polarised throughout the Cold War and post-Cold War period, Iran-Russia-India relations did however show signs of improvement at the beginning of the century, and they each supported the Northern Alliance prior to September 2001. The post-11 September 2001 period has not contributed to defuse the remaining tensions for a variety of reasons. After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, countries of the region either supported the US or tried to maintain or establish power for themselves in Afghanistan, including establishing links with groups that had been ignored during the Afghan constitutional process. While

each of the regional countries, such as Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia, each have their own interests as regards Afghanistan, they seem to share one general common interest: no return of the Taliban. But their positions are not always consistent.

- ♦ The situation is alarming in the entire region, since the geography of terrorist activities as well as extremist tendencies are expanding according to some participants. Unlike the situation prevailing a few years ago, in which extremism was concentrated in certain regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, re-emerging extremist movements are capable of imposing their rule on about 50% of the population in those countries, and even constitute a real 'shadow government' in certain areas. It has been a consistent policy of neighbouring countries to 'export' extremism to Pakistan and Afghanistan instead of tackling the problem themselves.
- ♦ On the one hand, there are positive signs of increasing activity in the region, if only taking into account the many conferences and meetings that have taken place during the last couple of years. India is deeply engaged in Afghanistan, and other relevant actors, namely China and Iran, are more inclined to cooperate now. China in particular has promised to increase its economic assistance to Afghanistan. Considering that there is no set practice beyond traditional diplomacy of regional organisations working effectively in the region, this trend towards cooperation and involvement constitutes a remarkable shift. On the other hand, the Western approach of holding more meetings involving more actors is not the solution. According to some participants, an Afghan-centric approach should be found, not a region-centric approach, to address the situation in Afghanistan, with the involvement of regional actors. But the prospects of the upcoming regional conference on Afghanistan, to be held in Islamabad in the coming days, were said to be not promising.

Participants also examined the respective positions and roles of countries in the region regarding Afghanistan:

- ♦ While some experts insisted that India should refrain from indirectly intervening in Afghanistan, others make the clear point that there is in fact 'very little' India can do, in particular to convince Pakistan of her good intentions. But of course the impact of India's policies in Afghanistan has a regional dimension. It was for instance mentioned that Iran had agreed that India build a road across Afghanistan to connect the two countries. Other participants stressed that India had

financed development and infrastructure projects all over Afghanistan, not just in the areas that could be of specific interest to her.

- ♦ India-Pakistan rivalries have exacerbated the regional problem, as well as serious incidents such as the Kabul blasts against the Indian embassy. The Indian government is trying to move beyond this, and circumvent this rivalry. According to some experts, in spite of the fact that India has always exercised restraint, the Pakistan military, due to insecurity and extremism, have used India as an easy justification of their power. The Indian aid programme to Afghanistan is the major commitment along the lines of classical peacebuilding to have occurred in Indian history. It is considered successful by most Indian and Afghan actors, since it has been designed according to Afghan requests. It should be acknowledged, however, that this is facilitated by the fact that there are no Indian troops in Afghanistan.
- ♦ In spite of Iran-Afghanistan relationships being friendly since Karzai took power, Iranian intelligence services are said to have established contacts with Afghan insurgents according to some sources. On the other hand, Iran has made a considerable contribution to the rebuilding of Afghanistan, notwithstanding the additional effort of having hosted large numbers of Afghan refugees for years. A crucial aspect of eventual stronger bilateral collaboration was the fight against drug trafficking, the majority of which is occurring across the Iranian border. The paradox of the Iran-Afghanistan relationship in fact relates to Iran's position towards the US. On the one hand, Iran has made attempts to weaken American influence, i.e. by delivering arms to insurgency groups in Afghanistan; on the other hand, the Taliban is a traditional enemy of Tehran. The lack of cooperation between Iran and the US was considered by one expert as one of the causes of the rise in extremism.
- ♦ Russia could in particular play a credible intermediary role between Iran and the international community, the precondition being that her interests in the region are taken into account. Russia is currently putting pressure on Kirghizistan – who shut down the US base despite NATO's call for more support – Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, for geo-strategic reasons linked to lucrative commercial interests in Afghanistan.
- ♦ Tajikistan is essential so that Afghanistan becomes a functional state, since it is particularly accessible for Afghans – including those connected to the insurgency – as the language is similar. But disappointment prevails

among Tajik citizens and government, whose expectations connected to the fall of the Taliban, as regards international involvement in the form of new working opportunities and procurement contracts on electricity and other sectors have not been met. The lack of investment has led to disillusionment and as a consequence there is now a growing rift between the two countries. It should be recalled that drug-trafficking is taking place from Afghanistan to Russia, via Tajikistan, without any sign of improvement despite international efforts.

- ♦ As regards Turkey, concerns were expressed about the possibility of her blocking a higher NATO involvement in Afghanistan due to the Cyprus issue. As a counter-argument, it was said that the strong interest of Turkey in Afghanistan since the 1930s has notably led to intense bilateral relations, NATO and ISAF frameworks being only of secondary importance for Turkey. In the framework of the ambivalence of her accession to the EU, the observation of procedures for EU-NATO cooperation was, however, acknowledged as a general problem. An enhanced cooperation with ESDP was considered the most adequate way to overcome the current obstacles. Turkey was also deemed by some experts to be a good possible mediator between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Some participants urged abandoning the new mantra of regionalisation of the Afghan problem, and feared that the so-called regional approach would entail more problems than it could solve. It was said that it creates hope and illusions rather than give answers to regional problems. For instance, Kashmir should not be linked to the Afghan problem. One participant recalled that the fact that there is no regional consensus precisely makes a regional strategy necessary, but it was also pointed out that the intention to 'fix' the whole region in order to 'fix' Afghanistan is far too ambitious and perhaps unrealistic. Moreover, it was argued that an increased presence of the US may lead to regional co-operation being thwarted, since it is not desired by Russia and Iran. Other participants stressed that Iran in particular would not explicitly admit that the US/NATO presence is welcome, but is showing acquiescence towards it in other ways.

Among the most specific recommendations made, notwithstanding previous remarks, were the following:

- ♦ In order to be realistic, the international community should concentrate on a few feasible tasks which have a regional dimension – the construction of roads through the region, shutting down drug-trafficking

routes, intelligence sharing – while upholding the principle of Afghan ownership. A very acute and often overlooked problem in the region that was mentioned in this context, which is directly connected to instability in the region, is the free flow of arms.

- ♦ Rather than insisting on a regional approach from the outside in the hope of obtaining short-term results, a meaningful external contribution to existing regional organisations, particularly to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), will help re-invigorate cooperation among South and Central Asian countries.

### 3. Countering or fuelling insurgency in Pakistan?

There were conflicting views also on the shift in the US strategy to focusing on Pakistan. On the one hand, it was said that the Pakistani government did not seem able to maintain stability and fight strengthening Islamic insurgencies; on the other hand, it was held that the US militarised presence in Afghanistan has in fact generated or at least re-invigorated extremism and insurgency both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The international response was considered largely inadequate by most participants. The lack of a common vision of the international community was pointed out. It was said that there is much talk about Pakistani weaknesses, particularly of civilian institutions *vis-à-vis* the army, and few consistent efforts designed to strengthen the capacity of the elected government. Excessive criticism was deemed of little help in the present circumstances. In particular, a dichotomy between the US and EU strategies was pointed out in this context. While the US strategy had evolved towards broadness and more inclusiveness, most EU countries appeared mainly to be thinking of how to exit Afghanistan. Some other experts insisted on the *how*, expressing the fear that the US was merely extending to Pakistan the militarised approach that has failed in Afghanistan over the years.

A wide range of other related questions were raised during the discussion, from the Kashmir conflict to Pakistani military capabilities:

- ♦ India would be willing to revive the peace process, according to some experts, but this may depend on

Pakistan's willingness to prevent or bring to law suspects of terrorist attacks taking place in India. In this sense, the Mumbai attacks represent new difficulties. It was also stressed that there is no short-term solution to the Kashmir issue, since it entails a historical compromise and would anyway require drastic changes in the chain of command. Intentions are not enough to convince the Pakistani government and people to withdraw the army. As long as Indian capabilities remain in the area, the Pakistanis will feel threatened. On the other hand, the Pakistani military's 'misguided obsession' with India was not considered helpful for the effort in fighting the Taliban. As for India itself, the threat of violence spilling over into India was deemed especially worrisome by some participants. In this context, China was mentioned as a possible honest broker as regards the Kashmir issue, since it was in a good position to increase Pakistan's confidence. Other experts replied that China cannot play such a role since it is in fact a party to the conflict and has not stated its position regarding the part of Kashmir it occupies.

- ♦ As regards the implications of the US demand to undertake counter-insurgency operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), some experts underlined that Pakistan needed to conduct these operations by itself, with the US offering training for the army. In this context, it was stated that 'fanatics' in Pakistan have accumulated a lot of power, and therefore represent a great threat. They are a pan-Islamic armed movement, which provides the Taliban with world support. Moreover, whenever the Pakistan government attempts to deal with them it ends up surrendering to them and making pacts. The ambiguous relationship between the Pakistani authorities and the militant groups in Pakistan, with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) helping the Taliban to regroup, was raised in this context.
- ♦ Two different reactions followed. The fear was expressed that any military assistance to Pakistan would end up in the hands of the insurgency – the Taliban being considered by the military as a kind of mercenary army in the event that India would dare to attack – as has been the case in the past. There is a need for absolute transparency regarding all aid to Pakistan. But it was also said that Pakistani forces were well trained to defeat the Taliban: while Pakistan needs help to improve the economy for instance, it did not need the West to teach counterinsurgency.
- ♦ The current alarming depiction of the security situation in Pakistan was regarded as a 'media-hype en-

deavour' by one participant. According to this view, the question to be debated is not whether Pakistan could fight the insurgency, but whether Pakistan could fight them under US terms. What Pakistan needs, it was added, is capacity building and economic growth. This statement was challenged by other participants who believe that economic growth is and will remain in the hands of the military in Pakistan.

- ♦ Some participants pointed out that the present situation in Afghanistan is beneficial for Pakistan, thus there is little hope of more decisive action to stabilize its neighbour. Other participants considered that it is not helpful to blame Pakistan, since a considerable amount of the funding for the insurgency appears to come from Saudi Arabia, and arms are provided by Russia as well as other countries.

Although the military offensive against the Taliban in areas in which agreement had been reached with the Pakistani government had not taken place by the time of the gathering, it was indeed foreseeable. The fear of a Wahhabi Islamic state being progressively established in Pakistan was to some experts a good reason to reinforce the commitment of the international community in the area. The debate was, again, on the how. Most experts insisted that a consistent international effort to strengthen civilian institutions in Pakistan is urgently required.

#### 4. Negotiation with whom in Afghanistan?

In a context of growing disaffection among the local population towards the external military presence, Afghanistan is experiencing political stagnation – including occasional setbacks – combined with increasing internal tensions and violence, both inter-ethnic and directed against internationals. The Taliban are to a great extent occupying the vacuum that has not been filled by local police and the local administration, while territorial control by external troops and training and equipping the Afghan military was given absolute preference by the US and most international actors since 2001.

The situation of armed actors in the country was described as extremely fragmented, including extremist groups playing against each other in order to gain a more prominent political position. This is aggravated

by the weakness of the current government, who has not put a halt to corruption, the narcotics trade, and insecurity. The upcoming elections can be seen as an opportunity to re-invigorate the government, but the fact that voters are disillusioned with the international community and fear the Taliban may jeopardize such an opportunity. The risk of a power vacuum as a consequence of the postponement of the elections beyond the constitutional limit was also mentioned.

In this complicated context, the prospects for mediation in Afghanistan between the legitimate authorities and disaffected groups – especially those excluded from the Bonn process – were also examined. In spite of recent failed initiatives undertaken by Karzai's government, the US call for negotiation and national reconciliation in the revised strategy was generally welcome. According to some experts, however, there are insurmountable obstacles to mediation in Afghanistan, starting with the fact that such a process cannot be triggered, much less imposed, from the outside.

The majority of participants also challenged the still prevailing focus of the US strategy, namely counter-terrorism, and called for a 'post-military' approach based on eradicating poverty. Since a renewed commitment to international law and multilateralism seems to be gaining ground with the new US administration, it is time that Afghanistan experienced the benefits of the new paradigm. Some participants feared that the new wording of the US strategy will not produce a shift of responsibilities on the ground. Other participants relied on the increase of troops as the only way to defeat terrorism in the region. It was said in this context that if the US and NATO were to announce their withdrawal, the Taliban would immediately fill the gap.

The main arguments and counter-arguments on the general international approach and framework for Afghanistan can be summarised as follows:

- ♦ The primary challenge of the international community in Afghanistan, as was recalled by several participants, is not terrorism but poverty. The need to eradicate poverty in Afghanistan should thus be at the forefront of all international efforts as the only way to achieve security in the medium term. Terrorism cannot be eradicated, it was claimed, without first eradicating poverty. The failure of a military-led strategy over the years should lead to restraining the use of force to a minimum, if not to a fundamental shift of priorities and responsibilities – i.e. to a truly civilian leadership – on the ground.

- ♦ Most experts openly called for a gradual withdrawal of troops and for the establishment of a UN leadership in Afghanistan. A post-military phase, a truly civilian humanitarian approach was urged, which does not of course mean that military personnel cannot play a fundamental role in supporting civilian efforts as international peacekeepers. Humanitarian and development action should be at the forefront of the strategy, with the military subordinately supporting those projects and activities considered necessary by the competent civilian, be it national or international, authorities. One expert considered that these proposals were premature, since military security was a minimum requirement for humanitarian reconstruction.
  - ♦ As an example of the lack of coordination, external programmes on rule of law and police training were mentioned: too many actors providing different training ultimately results in disintegration. One model should be designed, by the United Nations, not by the European Union or by any other actor, in order to overcome the current situation. Such a new model should in particular put greater emphasis on local traditions. For example, in many areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is not the police, but the elders that do the policing, although it was pointed out that the Taliban has killed many of them. The current traditional structures should be strengthened instead of merely introducing new (western) models that can only fail.
  - ♦ The economic side of the equation was also contemplated by some experts. The inability to absorb financial aid has not allowed for the creation of infrastructures that Afghanistan needs. This is what has forced the farmers to cultivate poppies, in order to escape poverty. But in another expert's view, it was the fact that the international community did not keep its promises on development which forced farmers into poppy cultivation as a consequence of inadequate international commitment, a situation well exploited by the Taliban. In a kind of vicious circle, international actors cannot wipe out the poppy fields now, as they fear it will drive the farmers into the hands of the Taliban.
  - ♦ A call was also made by some participants to enhance public consultation mechanisms in Afghanistan. The lack of public consultation may well be one of the main reasons for the decreasing support for the international community, thus the need to help Afghanistan create public services and credible broadcast media reaching the countryside in order to bring a sense of involvement to the people. The fact that a large part of the population is illiterate does not mean they have not developed a sophisticated political conscience.
- As regards the prospects for mediation, the basic consensus included the need to listen – which does not entail negotiations – to all different actors. The possibility of undertaking negotiations with local and district commanders and authorities gained ground during the discussion. This was also connected to the need to strengthen and empower local and district governments throughout the country. The relevant points raised by participants on these related issues are the following:
- ♦ According to some views, the precondition for a lasting peace in Afghanistan is to attract all actors, and especially the most powerful ones, to a renewed inclusive constitutional framework. There are experiences of how to successfully deal with disaffected political actors, such as a national reconciliation process. It was pointed out in this context that the international focus being now shifted to Pakistan gives some breathing space to Afghan actors – at least to those who believe in the constitutional order – to try and solve their internal rivalries. The fact that any successful process of dialogue, and especially an eventual re-foundation of the constitutional framework resulting from the Bonn process, can only be endogenous was stressed during the discussion.
  - ♦ In spite of a certain degree of ambiguity, regional players seem to be generally opposed to negotiations with the Taliban. It was also pointed out that neighbouring governments seem to know what they do not want, i. e. the Taliban in power, but they also do not want a military solution, which appeared to be a contradiction in case negotiation is not, as it seems, a realistic possibility. Some experts also dismissed the calls for more 'diplomacy', stressing the need for 'action' – a word which indeed acquired different meanings during the discussions.
  - ♦ In contrast with the assumption that 'victory' is possible, the new US strategy is presumably based on the idea that the ultimate solution for Afghanistan requires that all stakeholders are brought around the table, including the Taliban. The question is now negotiation and reconciliation with whom and how? The preliminary question seems to be who are the Taliban and what is their position towards negotiation. A discussion on the origins of the movement – a policy tool of Pakistan or Saudi

Arabia, a movement strengthened by the US against the *mujahedin*, depending on different versions – gave way to considerations on their current leadership and position vis-à-vis eventual negotiations.

- ♦ According to experts who believe negotiations are possible and even necessary, the Taliban have distanced themselves from al-Qaeda, as they are becoming more 'pragmatic', while the US is beginning to distinguish two broad categories of Taliban. It was said in this context that the international community has so far been misled in reducing the Taliban to a terrorist movement. It was also said that the strategies of the Taliban to some extent depend on the nature of the international involvement in Afghanistan, which in turn depends on not always accurate perceptions disconnected from local reality. But the Taliban are not the only disaffected actor. It was recalled that a high number of small and fragmented local groups, either traditional ones or ones that have sprung up spontaneously in the last few years, are struggling to maintain or regain territorial control in different provinces without any organic connection to the Taliban.
- ♦ The fundamental problems are, according to experts opposing negotiations, on the one hand, that the Taliban are committed to a pan-Islamic ideology and are not prepared to sit at the negotiating table; and, on the other hand, that there is no reliable leadership in the main branches of the movement. It was also pointed out as an insurmountable obstacle that joining the Taliban has become a way of life, as they manage to receive funds from certain countries as well as from drug trafficking. The pay for national security forces is at least three times less than the salary that the Taliban are ready to pay. This is one of their main strengths, together with the fact that, in contrast with international troops, some of them are prepared to die.
- ♦ Some participants considered that talking to the Taliban is inherently wrong, and that the international community should not 'surrender' to them. Only those elements of the Taliban who disarm and express their wish to reconcile can be included in the process. From a more pragmatic viewpoint, it was argued that there is a justifiable need to engage in talks with the insurgents due to the impossibility of victory in that type of warfare, as shown by history. It was however stressed that no peace conference or negotiation initiative will bring peace to Afghanistan, and that the role of the international community could only be complementary to any future peace process. In such an eventuality, an impartial peace-broker from the region – Turkey and

Japan were mentioned – will be of help.

- ♦ The possibility and even the need of mid-level talks met with agreement among the experts during the discussion. Considering the fragmentation of disaffected groups, the Afghan government and the international community should devise strategies to work more intensively with local commanders in order to create conditions for development, with due respect of traditions and culture. The role of the international community should be limited to creating conditions for such processes and intensifying development action to the extent possible. The development of the Northern and Western regions of Afghanistan into stable regions was mentioned by one participant as a way to weaken the Taliban.

## 5. What role for the EU?

The European Union has not found common ground in Afghanistan, partly due to the sharp line established by the Bush Administration between alignment or not with their way of implementing the consensual strategy. The Council was at least able to launch a comparatively small non-executive operation, EUPOL Afghanistan, in 2007, but member states have proved unable to overcome the initial fragmentation of the international response among them, even as a widespread sense of failure has been acknowledged in Europe.

Although Council Conclusions show the readiness of the EU to assume an active role in Afghanistan, especially in supporting democracy, good governance, and rule of law, the majority of participants pointed out the low profile presence of the EU as such. EU delegations in the region, especially those of the Council, were generally considered to be 'not very active', in contrast with declared intentions. One participant stressed the Europeans' lack of concern about Afghan and Pakistani problems. The motivation for the initial contribution of EU member states was to be a good ally to the US, hence the still prevailing lack of public support.

Some participants urged a boosted and more coherent European strategy in the wake of the revised American strategy, but it was felt that the law of inertia renders it rather unlikely. As a first lesson learned, member states should struggle to find anticipatory

common ground for action regarding the most compelling crises, since not even a favourable change of circumstances may leave way for pooling resources however imperative this might be in order to achieve the basic proclaimed goals.

It was also maintained that only by speaking with one voice could the EU play a significant role in helping political negotiations or even in shaping the international strategy. In particular, the EU has not been able to build a consistent link between aid programmes and policy making, and was urged to find appropriate bridges. The present situation, in which member states have appointed a series of special envoys for Afghanistan and Pakistan, together with the EU Special Representative, following Holbrooke's appointment, only confirms the perception of confusion that the EU still creates abroad.

In spite of general criticism, the EU was regarded as an extraordinary civilian actor among experts from the region, thus a reinforced leading role of the EU in this dimension will be very welcome. The EU is considered a pioneer in building institutions of regional cooperation, and according to some experts it must make use of this strength to increase the government's capacity both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Among the more concrete recommendations, the following were made:

- ◆ The EU should actively contribute to creating a com-

mon vision together with the US and other relevant actors that could be explained to public opinion.

- ◆ The EU should strengthen the development agenda in order to urgently eradicate poverty and also as a way to undermine the Taliban and similar groups.
- ◆ The EU, as a civilian actor, should be more forthcoming in areas that require a long-term commitment, such as education.
- ◆ The EU should increase the number of experts on the ground that monitor progress and report back on a regular basis, so that action is based on the evolution of the situation.

A final exchange of views on the role of research took place before the session closed. Although research can be regarded as a safe and sound basis of consensus, this has not always been the case as regards Afghanistan. The considerable amount of research undertaken in the US has not led to a consensus on the correct course of action, since the fundamental tension between the unilateral and multilateral approach greatly influenced the research perspective. In the new context, the intensification of exchanges between academics of, on the one side, South and Central Asian countries, and, on the other side, the US and the EU, may prove fruitful in order to help shape a legitimate international strategy, including strict guidelines on implementation and the specific role and responsibility of each national and international actor.



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