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| From: | General Secretariat of the Council |
| To: | Delegations |
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| Subject: | Statement on the situation in Afghanistan |

Delegations will find in annex the statement on the situation in Afghanistan, agreed by the Council (Justice and Home Affairs) at its meeting held on 31 August 2021.

STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

1. The EU Ministers of Home Affairs met today for an extraordinary Council meeting to discuss developments in Afghanistan, more specifically in relation to potential implications in the areas of international protection, migration and security. The seriousness of the evolving situation requires a determined and concerted response to its many dimensions by the EU and the international community.
2. The evacuation of our citizens and to the extent possible of Afghan nationals who have cooperated with the EU and its Member States and their families, has been conducted as a matter of priority and will be continued. In this regard, intensive work is underway to identify targeted solutions for the remaining specific cases of persons at risk in Afghanistan.
3. As an immediate priority, the EU will continue to coordinate with international partners, in particular the UN and its agencies, on the stabilization of the region and to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the vulnerable populations, in particular women and children, in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries. To this end, the EU and its Member States will step up financial support to relevant international organisations.
4. The EU will engage and 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. The EU will also cooperate with those countries to prevent illegal migration from the region, reinforce border management capacity and prevent smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. To this effect, the mandates of EU agencies should be used to their full extent. In particular, the European Asylum Support Office should step up its external operations for asylum capacity building. Furthermore, as part of global efforts, support could be provided in the form of resettlement on a voluntary basis, prioritising vulnerable persons, such as women and children.

5. The Action Plan on Afghanistan should be prioritised and revised in light of this statement and changed circumstances to make it more operational. A Team Europe approach is needed to work with Afghanistan's neighbours to address the impact of displacement in the region. The Council urges the Commission to assess all options for the necessary financial assistance under the Multiannual Financial Framework, in particular NDICI¹ and asylum, migration and border management instruments.
6. Based on lessons learned, the EU and its Member States stand determined to act jointly to prevent the recurrence of uncontrolled large-scale illegal migration movements faced in the past, by preparing a coordinated and orderly response. Incentives to illegal migration should be avoided. The EU should also strengthen the support to the countries in Afghanistan's immediate neighbourhood to ensure that those in need receive adequate protection primarily in the region. The need for unified and coordinated external but also internal communication is key. Targeted information campaigns should be launched to combat the narratives used by smugglers, including in the on-line environment, which encourage people to embark on dangerous and illegal journeys towards Europe.
7. The EU and its Member States will do their utmost to ensure that the situation in Afghanistan does not lead to new security threats for EU citizens. All efforts must be pursued to ensure that the Taliban regime ceases all ties and practices with international terrorism and that Afghanistan does not become once again a sanctuary for terrorists and organised crime groups. The EU will use all its available tools to closely monitor and respond to developments on the ground that might impact its security, in particular in the area of organised crime and terrorism, including its financing. Europol will provide an analysis of the criminal risks linked to the situation in Afghanistan. Exchange of information and intelligence, in line with national competences, also with third countries, and the sharing of regular threat assessments, are of utmost importance. The timely performance of security checks of persons being evacuated from Afghanistan remains crucial.

¹ NDICI – Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

8. The EU and its Member States, with the support of Frontex, remain determined to effectively protect the EU external borders and prevent unauthorized entries, and assist the most affected Member States. Appropriate security checks should be carried out, including through the full use of relevant EU databases, as well as registration in Eurodac. Furthermore, as part of our comprehensive approach to external cooperation on migration, third-country national clauses in the readmission agreements between the EU and certain transit countries should be used where the legal requirements are met.

The Council recognizes the need to support and provide adequate protection to those in need, in line with EU law and our international obligations, and to bring closer Member States' practices in the reception and processing of Afghan asylum seekers.

9. The Council will closely follow the developments in the area of international protection, migration and security. It will respond to attempts to instrumentalise illegal migration for political purposes and other hybrid threats, including by developing new tools. The Council will also monitor closely the implementation of the actions mentioned above and ensure regular stocktaking in order to further improve the EU's crisis management capacity, building upon the tools already developed. Coordination of all dimensions of this situation (humanitarian, development, international protection, migration, security, foreign policy) is crucial.
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