

Report

Europe's Engagement in Afghanistan

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**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
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The Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) organized a public talk under its Distinguished Lecture Series titled, "Europe's Engagement in Afghanistan" on October 4, 2011.

The speaker, a distinguished German scholar, Dr Christian Wagner, Head of the Asia Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, gave an insightful and comprehensive overview of the European Union's role, policy and commitment in Afghanistan.

In his welcome address, former chairman ISSI and former Foreign Minister, Mr Inam ul Haq, introduced Dr Wagner as an old friend of Pakistan as well as an expert on South Asia. Speaking about the lecture, he said that Afghanistan was of particular interest to Pakistan not only because both countries share a border but more importantly because all foreign forces intend to leave the country in 2014, thus allowing Afghanistan to once again become an independent state and rightfully regain its sovereign status.

Dr. Martin Axmann, Resident Representative, Hanns Siedel Foundation, in his welcome remarks stated that the topic of Dr Wagner's lecture is an issue that still continues to be ignored in Pakistan, and among the media, government, academics etc; the Afghan imbroglio tends to be viewed as a Pakistan – US – Afghanistan affair.

However, Dr. Axmann was optimistic that that the talk would help highlight the fact that Europe is heavily engaged and committed to Afghanistan's future. It has an important role to play not only in the transition process but also beyond 2014.

In his lecture, Dr Christian Wagner began by saying that after 9/11 and with the establishment of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, Europe has been heavily engaged in Afghanistan. The stabilization and development of Afghanistan is a major external priority for the European Union (EU), which has contributed more than 4 billion Euros to Afghanistan. The thrust of the European assistance has gradually shifted from humanitarian assistance and support for reconstruction towards development cooperation aimed at supporting priorities set out in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Highlighting EU assistance in Afghanistan since 2002, Dr. Wagner expressed that the emphasis has primarily focused on governance, infrastructure, agriculture, rural development, health and social protection reforms. Apart from this, he also highlighted several other EC projects in the areas of animal health, horticulture, irrigation and river basin management as well as the environment, support capacity development of relevant Afghan

administration institutions, and the improvement of veterinary services, agricultural productivity, water and environmental management and demining.

To maximize the benefits and impact of EC development assistance in Afghanistan, the EU-Afghanistan Country Strategy Paper (2007-2013) establishes that resources be concentrated on maximum six areas of cooperation, three focal ones (Governance, Rural development, health) and three non focal ones: (Social protection, Mine action, Regional cooperation)

Speaking about governance, He said that the EU has been supporting the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) since 2002, with more than EUR 207 million it has contributed significantly to building the capacity of the Afghan Administration. Similarly, EUR 270 million have so far been spent to the 'Law and Order Trust Fund' (LOTFA) which has financially supported more than 60 000 police officers and which has now also started to invest in strengthening the civilian capacity of the Afghan police force. The EC contribution in this field is complementary to the EUPOL police training mission provided by the EU Member States. Also, close to EUR 50 million of EC aid were invested in developing major border crossing posts in Torkham, Heiratan and Sher-Khan-Bandar on the borders with Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, thus significantly improving Afghan customs and border management.

He also highlighted the EU financial and technical assistance, amounting to 89 million EUR towards successfully clearing approximately 240 km² of land mines, enabling properties to be reconstructed and families to return home. According to the UN, during the second half of 2008 over 42,000 anti-personnel mines, 500 anti-tank mines and 1.5 million explosive remnants of war were destroyed.

Referring to the return and reintegration of Afghan refugees, he said that the EU has been encouraging and supporting this within the framework of the Afghan national reconstruction programme through special EC assistance aimed at improving the rural economy and health services in areas in Afghanistan that receive the largest proportion of returnees. In neighbouring Pakistan and Iran EC provides protection and basic assistance to Afghan refugees and has explored long-term solutions for the remaining caseload of refugees. It was also highlighted that since 2002, around 5 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan. Approximately 2 million Afghan refugees still remain in Pakistan and 1 million in Iran

Although the European Union continues to be one of the biggest donors in Afghanistan after the US, it continues to face many challenges inside the country. The EU, he said, comprised of different actors with diverging views and although there are disagreements among many member states regarding Afghanistan, the EU's commitment to

Afghanistan is long term and beyond 2014. He was of the opinion that 2014 should not be regarded as an end to international support to Afghanistan but merely the beginning. Mistakes made in the past particularly after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 would not be repeated. Highlighting the role of major contributing states like the UK, France, Italy and Germany, he said that the role his country Germany has played in helping to bring stability to Afghanistan had shown typical German commitment.

At present, Germany has about 5000 troops deployed in Afghanistan as part of the international peacekeeping force ISAF, making it the third-largest troop contributor after the US and UK. Most of the troops are based in the north of the country

Since the U.S.-led military operation began in 2001, 45 German soldiers have died in Afghanistan. The increasing number of casualties has caused widespread anger and resentment in many NATO member states, particularly Germany, undermining public support for the Afghan war. Troop deployment in Afghanistan has become more and more unpopular with the German public, as opinion polls suggest. According to the poll conducted by *YouGov research* firm on the behalf of DPA, 68 % of the respondents said they were against the German military presence in Afghanistan. Only 23 % of those surveyed said they supported German deployment, whereas 9 % had no opinion. Similarly, 44.2 % of the respondents demanded an immediate

withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan, and 42 % said that a wider lesson must be learnt from the Afghan experience, and noted that they do not want the German army to be sent abroad in the future.

Germany has played an important role in training Afghans, who at the end of 2012 are expected to take over the responsibility of security in their country from foreign troops. Some 200 German security forces train 5,000 Afghans annually.

In early 2002 Germany assumed responsibility for coordinating efforts to rebuild the Afghan police force at the request of the United Nations and the Afghan Transitional Government. An average of 40 Federal and Land police officers were seconded to Afghanistan each year between April 2002 and June 2007. During the initial phase, they helped in particular to develop the manpower plan, salary reform and police legislation. In addition, between 25 and 40 short-term experts were seconded each year to carry out basic and further training. They worked in Kabul, as well as Mazar-e- Sharif, Kunduz, Feyzabad and until late 2005 in Herat. This coordinating function was transferred in June 2007 to the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan – EUPOL Afghanistan. Germany seconds police officers and civilian experts to EUPOL and provides the Mission with funding.

German and international advisers from the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) are working in key

positions at the Interior Ministry. They are helping with the to build up the Afghan police force's new organizational structure. The focus is on providing support for the Afghan security authorities in leading and managing a police force which is committed to upholding rule-of-law principles and respecting human rights. He also highlighted that the training of female police officers is a special focus of Germany's support. The Afghan Government has expressed the desire to increase the number of female officers from the current estimated 700 to 5000 by 2013. Germany is supporting this goal by running special courses for female Afghan police officers. In particular, German female police instructors teach the women self-defence and intervention techniques

Dr Wagner concluded by speaking about the Lisbon Conference on Afghanistan, he said that although NATO has been actively involved in Afghanistan since 2001 and the fact that the transition process has begun with Afghan security forces have taken responsibility for the control of seven provinces, this remains a step by step process that would finish by 2014. It was made eminently clear at the conference that the international forces and particularly the EU would remain indefinitely in what is being portrayed as NATO-Afghan partnership.

The event was concluded after an enlightening question and answer session and closing remarks by Mr Inam ul Haq, who reiterated that it was of immense importance that Afghanistan, regains its status as a fully functional, independent and sovereign state.

Compiled by:
Amna Khan

Edited by:
Najam Rafique