

ISRS: It is important to consolidate the efforts of the international community in providing urgent humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan



On November 26, the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, together with the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, organized an online webinar on “New political reality in Afghanistan. Possible directions of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the EU” with the participation of leading experts and scientists from the two countries.

It was noted that the new Afghan government is facing complex sorts of problems, including political, socio-economic and security areas.

The most serious problem is the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which can have very negative consequences for the security and sustainable development of both Central Asia and the entire international community.

The International Monetary Fund and United Nations estimate a 30-40% decline in the country's economy this year. Also according to prognoses, the number of people living below the poverty line will reach 36 million people, that is, nearly 95% of the Afghan population.

The situation is also aggravated by the fact that Afghanistan has suffered from a severe drought for the second time in the past four years. It has affected 22 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan. This led to the loss of 40% of all crops and a 20% reduction in cereal harvests and 3 million livestock units. This was a serious shock to agriculture, which provides jobs and livelihoods for 43% of the country's population (nearly 17 million people). Overall, the natural disaster brought 37% of households in rural areas to the brink of survival. And this is a serious figure, given that 74% of the country's population, that is, more than 27 million people, live in rural areas.

Today, nearly 18,9 million Afghans, or 47% of the population, are already experiencing acute food insecurity. According to forecasts of the World Food Program and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, between November this year and March next year the number of people living in food shortage in Afghanistan could increase to 22,8 million people.

Meanwhile, in the conditions of aggravating the socio-economic crisis, women and children, who constitute the largest part of the population, are the most vulnerable. Today, according to the UN Population Fund, more than 60% out of 39,8 million people or 24 million Afghans are under 19 years old, while the number of women is over 48%, accounting for more than 19 million people.

According to the UN, more than 3,2 million children under the age of 5 are already at high risk, and 1 million children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition and could face death. Women and children also account for 80 percent of the more than 5 million Afghans who left their houses because of the crisis.



According to the ISRS First Deputy Director Akramjon Nematov, the deterioration of the socio-economic situation and the humanitarian crisis create fertile ground for uncontrolled migration, the growth of organized crime, drug and arms trafficking, and create conditions for strengthening the activities of extremist and terrorist organizations, including ISIS, primarily by recruiting young Afghans with no prospects of a better life.

The expert believes that the difficult socio-economic situation coupled with worsening of the military-political situation can lead to further destabilization of the situation not only in Afghanistan, but also the entire Central and South Asia region, with a new wave of refugees.

That's why considering the current dynamics and circumstances in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, as the closest neighbor, which is connected with the Afghan people by common history, religion, culture and traditions, by kinship ties, cannot leave alone this country with its problems.

Afghanistan itself will not be able to cope with these problems. So far, 75% of government spending and 43% of the country's GDP, which is about 8 billion dollars were formed by external financing. According to UNDP, Afghanistan's banks will lose 40% of their deposit base by the end of the year. The lack of financial resources aggravates the shortage of goods, especially food and medical products, accelerates inflation in Afghanistan, which has already reached more than 30%.

This is due to the fact that Afghanistan is heavily dependent on imports, which at the beginning of the year accounted for 95% of the structure of foreign trade turnover, amounting to more than 8 billion dollars.

A. Nematov noted the importance of consolidating the efforts of the international community in providing urgent humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Uzbekistan continues to provide comprehensive humanitarian aid to the friendly people of Afghanistan and promote international efforts in this direction, as well as develop cross-border cooperation. In particular, Uzbekistan is making efforts to turn the city of Termez into an International Hub for providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

Moreover, Uzbekistan understands the importance of unfreezing Afghanistan's international assets, which will be used for social needs, in particular, to pay the salaries of teachers, doctors, representatives of social spheres and poor citizens of that country.

Moreover, the importance of developing a post-conflict strategy concerning Afghanistan, which will create the necessary prerequisites for its formation as a peaceful, stable and prosperous country, free from terrorism, wars and drugs, was indicated.



Professor of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies Abdusamat Khaydarov emphasized that with the Taliban coming to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the current government seeks to use Islam as a stabilizing force and normalization of the situation in the country. Of course, after more than forty years of armed confrontation, there is discontent on the part of certain political forces in the country. Nevertheless, according to the professor, the current government is striving to resolve the current difficult economic situation, attracting national specialists for the effective work of state bodies. At the same time, the Afghan government is interested in developing cooperation with foreign countries, and primarily with neighboring countries, promising to create favorable conditions for them.

It seems, he noted, that today the Taliban are the only force capable of stabilizing the situation. Its further development will largely depend on the international community, its ability to use contacts with the current Taliban government to restore the country's economy.



Peter Wagner, an expert at the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, noted that today the main task of the new Afghan government is to gain international recognition. Since coming to power, the Taliban are trying to fulfill their obligations not only to the Afghan people, but also to the international community.

They announced a general amnesty to everyone who worked with the previous government – officials, the military. Girls began to go to school in some provinces of Afghanistan, and the country is waging a fight against international terrorist groups.

It was emphasized that the Taliban allows the international community to freely deliver humanitarian aid to vulnerable sectors of the population.

Nevertheless, according to the Hungarian expert, today one should not expect the Taliban to comply with Western human rights standards or establish a democratic system of government. When building a state on Afghan soil, it is necessary to take into account historical, national and religious traditions, which were ignored by Western countries in Afghanistan over the past 20 years.

In addition, as Mr. Peter Wagner said, on their part, the EU states have provided 1 billion euros in recent months to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan. In the near future, the EU plans to allocate another 200 million euros for humanitarian aid and other programs, including those aimed at educating

young people.

At the same time, as the representative of the Hungarian think tank noted, taking into account the deep understanding of the Afghan situation in Uzbekistan, the EU is interested in cooperating with Tashkent in the Afghan direction. “Only coordinated and consolidated efforts of regional and international countries can become a serious barrier to turning Afghanistan into a source of a permanent threat to the international community”, he concluded.

The online webinar was held within the framework of a Memorandum of Cooperation between ISRS and the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, signed in March 2021 during the visit of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to Uzbekistan.

Hungary is a member of the European Union, represented in the Organization of Turkic States, and is the leading partner of Uzbekistan in Eastern Europe. Since 2016, trade with Hungary has grown 2.5 times to \$110 million in 2020, the volume of investments attracted is more than \$140 million.

Source