

# WEEKLY ANALYSIS

Issue Number – 476  
(May 21-27, 2025)

## THE EUROPEAN UNION'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN

---



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.

## In this issue:

- The European Union's Foreign Policy towards the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan ..... 3
- Background: European Union Relations with Afghanistan ..... 3
- Fall of the Republic and the European Union's Reaction ..... 4
- Afghanistan's Place in EU Foreign Policy ..... 5
- European Union Policy Towards the Islamic Emirate ..... 6
- Future of Relations and Possible Scenarios ..... 7
- Conclusion ..... 8
- Recommendations ..... 8
- References ..... 9



## THE EUROPEAN UNION'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN

### Introduction

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021 serves as a prime example of complex international engagement within the framework of development-oriented and security policies. By allocating billions of euros in financial aid through international conferences like Tokyo (2002) and Berlin (2004), the EU became one of the primary supporters of rebuilding government structures, strengthening democratic institutions, and combating drug trafficking in Afghanistan. The military presence of member states within NATO further underscored Europe's multifaceted commitment to the country. However, these partnerships were consistently challenged by issues such as administrative corruption in Kabul and resistance from anti-government groups, which limited the effectiveness of the programs. After 2021, the EU adopted a conditional approach, focusing its aid on humanitarian support and pressuring for the preservation of achievements from the past two decades, particularly in the area of human rights. This strategy, however, has been met with inflexibility from the Islamic Emirate in accepting international standards.

Recent trends indicate that the EU, in its engagement with the Islamic Emirate, faces a dichotomy between ethical imperatives (human rights) and geopolitical realities (migration, terrorism, and competition with China and Russia). On one hand, a policy of "engagement without recognition" is pursued through humanitarian channels and international organizations, exemplified by the allocation of €903 million in emergency aid during 2021-2023. On the other hand, internal disagreements among member states regarding their stances have hindered the formation of a unified policy. These contradictions, set against a backdrop of regional developments such as the increasing influence of rival actors and the worsening livelihood crisis in Afghanistan, cast a shadow of uncertainty over the future of these relations.

### BACKGROUND: EUROPEAN UNION RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN

Undoubtedly, the relationship between the European Union (EU) and Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021 is one of the region's most significant international interactions. Following the September 11th incident, the EU emerged as one of the largest donors to Afghanistan, making substantial financial commitments for the country's reconstruction at international conferences such as Tokyo (2002) and Berlin (2004).

The EU played a crucial role in developing Afghan governmental institutions, judicial reforms, border management, combating drug trafficking, and economic reconstruction. Furthermore, European countries maintained a military presence within NATO, ostensibly providing



international peacekeeping forces. In the final years of the Republic, the EU reaffirmed its commitments to Afghanistan, supporting peace efforts and stability in the country. The EU emphasized that its financial and political aid would be conditional on preserving democratic achievements, human rights, and preventing the return of the Islamic Emirate. Additionally, the EU supported inter-Afghan dialogue and the formation of an inclusive government, calling for a permanent cessation of hostilities.

Even after the fall of the Republic, efforts by EU representatives to normalize relations with the Islamic Emirate have been observed, in addition to human rights issues. For instance, in 2023, the European Commission announced a new aid package of €146 million for Afghanistan, covering essential services such as health, education, and food security. This aid also focused on supporting the rights of women and girls, with a portion allocated to UN development programs. Since 2021, the EU has allocated over €903 million to meet basic needs and livelihoods in Afghanistan.

Despite this aid, challenges persist in the relationship between the EU and Afghanistan. The EU continues to refuse recognition of the Islamic Emirate and demands extensive reforms in the Afghan government. At the same time, some European countries are seeking ways to engage with the current Afghan government, with Islamic Emirate political representations active in certain European countries such as Spain, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and the Afghan consulate in Munich, Germany. Meanwhile, others emphasize the necessity of diplomatic pressure. This situation highlights the complexity of the EU's relations with Afghanistan and the uncertain future of these interactions.

#### **FALL OF THE REPUBLIC AND THE EUROPEAN UNION'S REACTION**

With the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, the entry of Islamic Emirate forces into Kabul, and Ashraf Ghani's flight from the country, the republican system, which had been supported by the international community for two decades, suddenly collapsed. This development caused widespread chaos, and many Afghan citizens, especially those who had cooperated with the previous government, faced an uncertain future. In the initial days after the collapse, Western embassies were rapidly evacuated, and thousands of Afghans frantically tried to leave the country via Kabul airport. This situation prompted immediate reactions from the international community, including the European Union.

In its initial reaction to the fall of the Republic, the EU expressed grave concern over the human rights situation, particularly the rights of women and girls. Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, announced that the EU was prepared to cooperate with various parties to prevent a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The EU also stressed that any engagement with the Islamic Emirate would be conditional on respect for human rights and



the establishment of an inclusive government. In the first days after the fall, emergency meetings were held in Brussels to decide on how to provide aid to the Afghan people. The EU also announced that it would increase its humanitarian assistance, but made the recognition of the new Afghan government conditional on adherence to democratic principles.

Alongside diplomatic reactions, the EU sought to send humanitarian aid to Afghanistan through cooperation with international organizations. The EU allocated new financial packages to support the Afghan people and emphasized that this aid would be transferred directly to humanitarian organizations, not to the Islamic Emirate government. Furthermore, the EU urged its member states to cooperate in accepting Afghan refugees. Some European countries, such as Germany and France, announced programs to accept Afghans who felt at risk. However, concerns about migration waves and security challenges persisted among European countries. Over time, the EU adjusted its policies towards Afghanistan and sought to encourage the Islamic Emirate to respect human rights and establish an inclusive government through diplomatic pressure. However, the Islamic Emirate's unwillingness to accept the EU's conditions complicated relations between the two sides. The EU continues to emphasize that future interactions will be conditional on fundamental changes in the Islamic Emirate's domestic policies. This situation highlights the deep challenges in EU-Afghanistan relations after the fall of the Republic.

#### **AFGHANISTAN'S PLACE IN EU FOREIGN POLICY**

Afghanistan previously held a significant position in the European Union's foreign policy, especially after the September 11th attacks. However, following the Islamic Emirate's return to power, while the EU reopened its embassy in Kabul within a few months, it has adopted a cautious policy towards Afghanistan over nearly four years. The EU emphasizes that any engagement with the new government is conditional on the observance of human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, and the establishment of an inclusive government.

The EU has also continued to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people through international organizations. Some European countries, such as Germany and France, have adopted stricter policies towards the Islamic Emirate, while others are seeking ways for limited engagement with the current Afghan government. These differing views mean that the EU's policy towards Afghanistan is still evolving and under review.

One of the EU's main concerns regarding Afghanistan is the issue of migration and regional security. In recent years, the EU has faced waves of migration from Afghanistan and has tried to manage this crisis by cooperating with Afghanistan's neighboring countries. Additionally, the EU is concerned about the increasing influence of China and Russia in the region and is working to maintain its role in Central Asia through diplomacy and economic cooperation. However,



the Islamic Emirate's unwillingness to accept the EU's conditions has complicated relations between the two sides, leaving the future of the EU's interactions with Afghanistan uncertain.

Overall, Afghanistan remains a part of the EU's foreign policy. Although its role has diminished since the fall of the Republic, it has not been eliminated. Europe remains practically engaged with Afghanistan for reasons such as maintaining regional stability, addressing threats from regional terrorism, and preventing widespread migration. This engagement primarily takes the form of humanitarian aid, support for civil society outside the country, and limited diplomatic consultations.

#### **EUROPEAN UNION POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE**

The European Union has adopted a cautious and conditional policy towards the Islamic Emirate. It has emphasized that engagement with Afghanistan's new government will only be possible if the Islamic Emirate adheres to its international commitments, including respect for human rights (especially those of women and girls) and the establishment of an inclusive government. The EU has also stated that it will continue its humanitarian aid, but this assistance will be directly transferred to the Afghan people and humanitarian organizations, not to the Islamic Emirate government.

In the months following the Republic's collapse, the EU attempted to compel the Islamic Emirate to accept reforms through diplomatic pressure. The EU's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Tomas Niklasson, has repeatedly stressed the necessity of forming an inclusive government in numerous meetings with Islamic Emirate officials and representatives of the international community. However, the Islamic Emirate has not yet responded positively to the EU's requests for fundamental changes in the government's structure. This situation has led the EU to continue its refusal to recognize the Islamic Emirate government, limiting its interactions to humanitarian issues and emergency aid.

One of the main challenges for EU policy towards the Islamic Emirate is how to engage with this government without legitimizing it. The EU has tried to deliver humanitarian aid to the Afghan people through cooperation with international organizations. However, differences in perspective among European countries regarding the Islamic Emirate persist. These differences mean that the EU's policy towards the Islamic Emirate remains fluid and under review.

Overall, the EU's policy towards the Islamic Emirate is based on a "limited conditional engagement" approach, coupled with indirect pressure. This policy may be aimed at preventing uncontrolled migration to Europe, maintaining a minimum level of influence in Afghanistan's development, or, ultimately, claiming to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.





Accordingly, Europe emphasizes dialogue with the Islamic Emirate but does not consider it a substitute for political recognition.

In response, the Islamic Emirate has also sought to increase its engagement with European countries through diplomatic and economic means. These efforts include the Doha talks in November 2021, the presence of Islamic Emirate representatives at the Oslo meeting in January 2022, the reopening of the Afghan consulate in Oslo this year with the acceptance of Najibullah Shirkhani by Norway, and meetings with representatives of European companies to explore economic opportunities. Despite these efforts, the EU has continuously refrained from formally recognizing the Islamic Emirate, always emphasizing that any engagement with the Afghan government must be based on human rights principles and the establishment of an inclusive government.

### **FUTURE OF RELATIONS AND POSSIBLE SCENARIOS**

The future of relations between the European Union and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan remains uncertain and complex. On one hand, the European Union continues to pursue a cautious policy, emphasizing that any engagement must be conditional on the respect for human rights. On the other hand, the Islamic Emirate has thus far failed to respond positively to the EU's calls for inclusive governance, leaving bilateral relations in a state of limbo. The European Union has refrained from recognizing the Islamic Emirate as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, limiting its interactions to humanitarian and emergency assistance. Some analysts argue that the EU has demonstrated a degree of flexibility in its policies, which could potentially benefit the Islamic Emirate in the future.

**Scenario One:** One possible scenario for the future of EU-Afghanistan relations involves the continuation of the current status quo, in which the European Union maintains humanitarian aid to the Afghan people through international organizations but refrains from formal engagement with the Islamic Emirate. This approach allows the EU to exert political pressure on the Emirate to respect human rights and to work towards inclusive governance. However, it may also prompt the Islamic Emirate to strengthen ties with other global actors such as China and Russia. Such a development could have implications for the EU's foreign policy in the region and diminish its influence over Afghanistan's political trajectory.

**Scenario Two:** A second scenario envisions a limited and conditional engagement between the European Union and the Islamic Emirate. In this case, the EU may initiate certain economic and diplomatic collaborations with the Afghan authorities while continuing to insist on human rights compliance and inclusive governance. This approach could potentially increase the EU's leverage in Afghanistan, enabling it to influence the Emirate through sustained dialogue. Nevertheless, this scenario faces significant challenges, given the Islamic Emirate's persistent



reluctance to accept the EU's conditions. As such, the success of this strategy remains uncertain and contingent on the willingness of the Emirate to engage meaningfully.

**Scenario Three:** Finally, a third scenario involves a fundamental shift in EU policy toward recognizing the Islamic Emirate as a political reality. Under this scenario, the European Union may seek to normalize diplomatic relations with the Emirate and explore broader cooperation in economic and security domains. Such normalization could provide the EU with greater opportunities to play a constructive role in Afghanistan's development. However, it may also lead to internal divisions within the Union, as some member states, such as France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and others that have not recognized the Islamic Emirate, may oppose this approach and advocate instead for sustained diplomatic pressure.

Overall, these scenarios reflect the complexity and sensitivity of the EU's engagement with Afghanistan, highlighting the delicate balance between strategic interests, normative values, and geopolitical dynamics in shaping future relations.

## CONCLUSION

An analysis of the European Union's relations with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan reveals a profound divide between the EU's normative values and its geopolitical imperatives concerning Afghanistan. Since the Islamic Emirate's return to power in 2021, Brussels has sought to strike a delicate balance, offering non-political humanitarian assistance to address the acute humanitarian crisis while simultaneously avoiding the legitimization of the new regime. However, the Emirate's continued adherence to certain domestic policies, such as restrictions on women's education and employment, and its refusal to establish an inclusive government have effectively obstructed any meaningful progress in bilateral relations.

On the other hand, the Islamic Emirate's gradual gravitation toward non-Western actors such as China and Russia poses potential security concerns and risks undermining the EU's influence in the region. In such a complex and challenging environment, it appears that the path to improved relations requires cautious flexibility. The Islamic Emirate could create a pathway out of international isolation by accommodating select demands of the international community, particularly those that do not contradict Islamic Sharia and are not perceived as a threat to religious values. Ultimately, such steps may pave the way for formal engagement, offering opportunities for economic development and alleviating international pressure.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Islamic Emirate should consider accepting certain demands of the international community, particularly those that do not contradict Islamic Sharia, as a step toward breaking isolation and gaining global recognition.





2. Regular diplomatic meetings with EU representatives should be prioritized as a central pillar of the Emirate's foreign policy agenda to enhance relations.
3. The Islamic Emirate should initiate structured media campaigns to promote a positive image of Afghanistan in Europe.

## REFERENCES

1. International Center for Peace Studies. *The European Union and Afghanistan: Actions and Challenges*, 11 October 2012. [Link](#)
2. Institute for East Strategic Studies. *Analysis of the EU's Approach to Afghanistan*, 4 August 2022. [Link](#)
3. Institute for East Strategic Studies. *Examining Strategic Deficiencies in Europe's Policy*, 11 January 2022. [Link](#)
4. AVA Press. *Five Afghan Political Missions Active in Europe under IEA's Foreign Ministry*, 6 August 2024. [Link](#)
5. TOLO News. *Collapse of the Republic and the Rise of the Emirate*, 14 August 2022. [Link](#)
6. Euronews. *What Does the U.S. and NATO Withdrawal from Afghanistan Mean for Europe?*, 16 May 2021. [Link](#)
7. Deutsche Welle (DW). *New Report on the Causes of the Republic's Collapse*, 25 July 2023. [Link](#)
8. Institute for East Strategic Studies. *The EU and the Taliban Government*, 9 January 2022. [Link](#)
9. Civil Society Portal of Afghanistan. *Policy Brief: EU Presence and Activities in Afghanistan after 2021*, 1 April 2021. [Link](#)
10. Ariana News. *EU Special Envoy Calls for Inclusive Government and Engagement with the IEA*, 10 January 2024. [Link](#)
11. TOLO News. *EU's Position on the Current Government of Afghanistan*, 12 May 2022. [Link](#)
12. Institute for East Strategic Studies. *Futures Studies on Afghanistan*, 14 April 2022. [Link](#)



---

The Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) is an independent, non-profit, and non-governmental research organization established in July 2009 in Kabul. CSRS is committed to promoting policy-oriented research through conducting authentic and unbiased research concerning Afghanistan and the region.

**Contact Us:**Email: [info@csrsaf.org](mailto:info@csrsaf.org)Website: [www.csrsaf.org](http://www.csrsaf.org)

Phone &amp; WhatsApp: +93780618000

