

TALKING POINTS OF THE HEAD OF POLITICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC), MR. AMER KAPETANOVIĆ

PARADIGM CHANGE IN AFGHANISTAN

„Human security, transnational crime and terrorism: Old, new and emerging security threats in the wake of Taliban Caliphate establishment“

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Dear Ambassador Minutto-Rizzo, moderators, panellists, colleagues and friends,

- On behalf of the Regional Cooperation Council, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to today's Webinar;
- The extensive media coverage has made the situation familiar to all of us: the quick takeover of much of the country by Taliban in August and since then the reports about the **violations of international humanitarian law** and abuses of human rights, including those of women and children.
- As the events unravel it is our responsibility **to cultivate understanding and awareness** of potential security threats to South East Europe. Humanitarian violations on the ground are naturally abhorrent, but **implications are much broader** and could impact the region significantly. The purpose of this webinar is to explore precisely this aspect of developments.
- When we consider the security threats which are potentially arising from this situation, we have the opportunity to **learn from previous experiences** of similar threats, and therefore act proactively and enhance regional preparedness.
- Let me elaborate shortly on five challenges that our **region might face** in the context of the paradigm change in Afghanistan. Order is rather **random** and has nothing to do with prioritisation:
 1. **Migration and Illegal migration:** UNHCR has estimated that since January 2021, additional **270,000 people in Afghanistan** have been forced to leave their homes, bringing the total displaced population to more than **3.5 million**¹. We can expect that significant numbers of people will seek refuge in neighbouring countries or outside the region. Experience has demonstrated institutional cooperation and coordination in the region are weak and border and migration management capacities are insufficient.
- Mismanagement of the sudden large influx of migrants in the Western Balkans has likely contributed to the fact that **70% of Western Balkan citizens** believe that incoming migrants are a security risk, according to RCC's Securimeter. There is no reason to believe that the region is today **better equipped to handle such a crisis** compared to the previous one.

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2021/7/60ed3ba34/unhcr-warns-imminent-humanitarian-crisis-afghanistan.html>

2. **Illicit Arms trafficking:** besides a common wisdom of a large quantity of arms and SALW left behind in hands of Taliban, even more dangerous is the fact that we have such a huge country where production of SALW and its trade is not under control at all. There is no tracking mechanism, serial numbers, so we can easily guess how criminal gangs and terrorist can easily come in possession of it. We shall here more during the panel.
 3. **Drugs Trafficking:** It has been noted that the Taliban seek to expand and consolidate control over the production and trafficking of narcotics and to diversify from heroin into methamphetamine, in what Afghan counter-narcotics officers **called “a coming catastrophe for the world.”**The relative costs of heroin and methamphetamine make them an attractive diversification for the Taliban, who is said to **earn around \$3 billion annually trafficking opium** and heroin produced principally in southern Afghanistan. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, **at least 85 percent of the world’s heroin** is sourced in Afghanistan.
 4. **Terrorism and Violent Extremism:** Prior to its initial dislocation, the Taliban Caliphate used to serve as the **safe haven for various terrorist** and extremist groups directed against Western values and targets. Similarly, today the country’s new leaders are committed to an extreme interpretation of religion, maintain relations with terrorist groups such as al-Qaida and **promulgate an autocratic political system** that denies democracy. This raises multiple questions for South East Europe and the Western Balkans, not least with regard to a potential new outflow of citizens to the systems of religious extremism. We have **seen this happen during the rule of ISIS in Syria and Iraq:** The situation is made more difficult due to popular interpretations that the **Taliban victory represents Western defeat.**
 5. **Women and Human Rights:** Although we are not going to cover it as standalone topic today, treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan is an issue we should keep high on our agenda. We should not be complacent with some minor signals of good will of Taliban Leadership to allow women to work and educate. The female literacy rate nearly doubled in a decade to 30% in 2018, according to a UNESCO report this year, and the number of girls in school went from nearly zero in 2001 to 2.5 million in 2018, making up nearly half of all primary students. Now such trend is in real jeopardy and we have to raise our voice whenever we speak about Afghanistan, because there is no stability and peace without protecting women and girls.
- This creates an explosive cocktail of challenges that require our attention and resilience, no matter if we agree or disagree on order of priorities. Most if not all of these challenges have a **transnational character**, which leaves no doubt that they are best addressed through a **cooperative framework, in close alliance with the Euro-Atlantic partners.**
 - Regional Cooperation Council is eager to provide space and facilitate discussions which allow for just such framework. **This webinar is geared precisely toward this purpose**, and I am glad that we are joined today by the eminent experts and practitioners who will help us better understand the context, threats, and effective policy solutions.
 - I look forward to our discussion today and thank once again the panellists, participants and the audience for joining us.