

Diplomacy through international organizations. Solutions to Afghan challenges in Central Asia¹

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyse the role of the most important non-state actors in preventing the non-military risks to security, such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), European Union (EU), but also the possibilities to spur cooperation on multiple levels in Central Asia and, especially, in Afghanistan.

Key words: Afghanistan, Central Asia, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Collective Security Treaty Organization, European Union

Introduction

The Afghan problem, as it is evidenced in numerous studies and articles about the evolution of the Afghan society or about the strategic importance of Afghanistan in Central Asia, is to be found on the agenda of the most important state and non-state actors, situation in which are developed viable strategies for reconstruction, or, on the contrary, being taken into account the

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non interference in the Afghan situation and the limitation to humanitarian actions and the development of projects of symbolic importance. In our opinion, as mentioned in a previous article², it is necessary to develop and implement new approaches, complex and effective in the humanitarian, political and socio-economic spheres, that will contribute to solving the problem of building and strengthening the Afghan state. It is necessary new approaches and development methods that will allow Afghanistan to gain its independence, to rebuild its statehood, to make the transition from a destroyed society and economy, influenced by the economy based on drug trafficking, which represents more than a half of the country's GDP, to a prosperous and strengthened society.

Crushed for decades not only by strategies, interventions and military actions, Afghanistan is being regarded as important by the international community also due to the deepening of the Afghan refugees problem, firstly in the neighboring countries, which often perceive the situation as a threat to social order and legality. Therefore, the most likely solution is to withdraw the refugee status, which implies their deportation as illegal immigrants.

Basically, if the refugee problem would not be politicized, if the forced character of the Afghan migration would be understood, if means for the accommodation of migrants would be allocated both by the countries which receive refugees and the international organizations, then it will be possible to solve this problem sooner or later.

The Afghan refugee problem in Central-Asian countries, in Iran, Pakistan and not only, is not recent, such uncontrolled population movements taking place during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, between 1979-1989. Recently, in the context of the withdrawal of the ISAF mission, have

² Mihalache, V., „Problema afgană în context regional. Realități și perspective”, în *Revista Română de Studii de Intelligence*, nr. 13, iunie 2015, 58-68.

occurred discussions regarding the possible influx of refugees from Afghanistan in the case of a violence outbreak. It is what experts in this field consider to be a non-military threat to security, Central-Asian states requesting a wider participation of the international community³. Therefore, we intend to identify the role of the most important non-state actors in preventing non-military risks to security, such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), European Union (EU), excepting the list of mechanisms and actions taken by UN specialized agency for refugee issues – UNHCR, since the data made available annually are easy to access. According to the recent data provided by the UNHCR⁴, Afghans are currently one of the most numerous groups of refugees, comprising a number of 2.5-3 million people, that have accommodated mainly in Pakistan and Iran, where they traveled between 1979-1989. Regardless of where they have found accommodation, they are facing great difficulties related to the inability or complexity to obtain citizenship, the difficulty of finding a job, to gain access to health care and education. Many refugees, however, have been deported due to the fact that local authorities failed to provide them with all that this special status implies.

The role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Afghanistan, as an observer state in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), is in the area of responsibility of the organization, context in which the proposals made by a group of

³ Anonymous interviews with experts from Central-Asian countries regarding the Afghan problem, conducted at Almaty, 11 May 2012, Dushanbe, 16 May 2012 and Bishkek, 22 May 2012. Apud Laruelle, M., Peyrouse, S., Ахунова, V., Отношения Афганистана и стран Центральной Азии: какую роль может сыграть ЕС?, 13. Available at http://fride.org/download/WP13_Ru.pdf. Accessed at 08.03.2015

⁴ More in *UNHCR Global appeal 2015 Update, Afghanistan*. Disponibil la <http://www.unhcr.org/5461e6090.html>. Accesat la 22.04.2015

Russian experts⁵ to create the Afghan Fund of SCO in order to develop and implement a Complex Plan for Developing Afghanistan, joining other initiatives⁶, under the aegis of the UN, to develop the country, may be of interest. On the other hand, there have not been developed yet the reaction mechanisms of the Sco to emerging threats and to the actual needs of regional and national economic development. The issue of poverty increase, for example, is quite stringent, and SCO may play an important role, but not before developing main directions for solving social problems within it, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan representing the weakest links.

In the last period, within the annual SCO summits, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are trying to find a consensus on the Afghan problem, analyzing the consequences of the withdrawal of ISAF troops from Afghanistan and trying to become a guarantor of regional security. On the one hand, there is a concern regarding the identification of SCO priorities in order to solve social problems, as they are most often the source of threats to the security of member states. In this context, it is taken into consideration the implementation of modern projects to solve social problems, as well as the implementation of a strategic concept that will include the fight against poverty. On the other hand, there are opinions⁷ according to which Sco is not able to meet the challenge of becoming the guarantor of security in the region, due tot the fact that, although the role of this

⁵ This group – consisting in experts of the Institute for Demography, Migration and Regional Development, I. Krupnov, A. Derenikian, I. Batîrşin, B. Krupnov, S. Melentiev – develops the geostrategic conception of Greater Middle East, as a unique geoeconomic and geocultural macroregion, that should become the core of Central Asian common market and a dialogue platform for its nations and civilizations. More in Mihalache, V., *Op.cit.*, pp. 58-68.

⁶ International Conference „The Peace and Development of Afghanistan”

⁷ Raffaello Pantucci și Shanshank Joshi, apud Siddik, A. și Klevţova, A., „ШОС и последствия ухода НАТО из Афганистана”, 2013. Available at <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/sco-summit-regional-security-issues/25104621.html>. Accessed at 09.03.2015.

multilateral format of cooperation has been expanded to the response to threats, such as terrorism, separatism and extremism, it failed to establish mechanisms and institutions that may be able to efficiently respond to these particular threats. Furthermore, the efficiency of SCO is undermined by the rival regional interests of Russia and China, the strong relationships maintained by one of the two regional powers with other relevant state actors in the region being viewed with skepticism by the other. If some of SCO observers and, in the same time, regional players such as India, Pakistan and Iran, will receive full membership status, it will further complicate the situation. In this group are predominant real contradictions, and the areas in which member state can cooperate are limited.

Regarding the situation of the other members – Central-Asian states, which face directly the problems generated by the Afghan migration, we can draw the picture of the complexity and social, humanitarian effects of this phenomenon. Afghan refugees faced serious problems in Tajikistan. Until 2007, has been in function the UN programme to transfer refugees from Tajikistan to third countries, but this programme has been canceled eventually. In the same year, Tajik authorities have tried to deport the refugees from Dushanbe, where they came looking for a job, to remote areas from the border, where they had been formerly registered. Refugees were allowed to live only in certain cities and districts. After the events from Khorugh, the Tajik government began to consider deporting Afghan refugees, due to the fact that among fighters were some Afghans. Similar restrictions were imposed for Afghan refugees in Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan forced the Afghan refugees to leave the country in 1990. As a result, in the country currently live mainly business man who run accredited companies. A complicated situation for Afghan refugees occurred in Kazakhstan, where they fight to obtain a legal status. Here have arrived almost 2500 Afghans, but, only 662 people have

been officially recognized as refugees. In the last period, Kazakh authorities have significantly complicated the procedure for obtaining citizenship, even for the Afghans that have been living in this country for 15-20 years. The Afghans consider that this attitude will lead to the loss of sympathy for this country. Essentially, the solution⁸ seems to be represented by the separation of the refugee problem from the other political issues and to solve it through the implementation of particular programmes, in order to avoid the transformation of Afghan citizens who, most likely, in most cases will be deported as hostages of political differences.

The role of Collective Security Treaty Organization

Equally active appear to be the concerns of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), particularly those related to the prevention of illegal migration, the control of migration flows, the legal settlement in the field, increasing the efficiency of the activity of border control authorities, developing a reliable system for exchanging information between competent authorities of CSTO member states, given that, taking into account the withdrawal of the International Force for Security Assistance in Afghanistan, it is not excluded the confrontation with a mass influx of refugees. Based on the forecasts about the instability of the situation in Afghanistan, Nikolai Bordyuja⁹, General Secretary of CSTO, considers that there is a high probability that the flow of Afghan refugees to increase. Firstly, in the case of a scenario of this kind, measures are designed to help Tajikistan¹⁰ to manage this flow, to

⁸ Vertohurov, D., „Стоит ли политизировать проблему афганских беженцев?“, 2012. Available at <http://infoshos.ru/ru/?idn=10340>. Accessed at 9.03.2015.

⁹ More in „ОДКБ мобилизуется для ответа на «афганские» вызовы безопасности Центральной Азии“, 2014. Available at <http://eurazvitiye.org/publication/20141001-0>. Accessed at 06.08.2015.

¹⁰ The Tajik-Afghan border is almost 1500 km, the biggest in comparison with other Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan.

regulate it, to give shelter to those who are crossing the borders to Tajikistan. Secondly, against the military risk from Afghanistan to the stability in Central Asia, have been taken measures to help Tajikistan to strengthen the border with Afghanistan, but it is admitted that the programme to develop an infrastructure at the Tadjiko-Afghan border and necessary mechanisms for protecting this infrastructure, including the regulation of migrants flow, requires international support. From the information obtained by the special services of the CSTO member states, in the area adjacent to the Tadjiko-Afghan border appear more and more armed Taliban groups or members of the Islamic Movement from the Eastern Turkestan. If it is taken into consideration the security issue related to drug trafficking routes then, indeed, the activity of border control authorities becomes increasingly ineffective.

The situation is more concerning due to the fact that Tajikistan is among the poorest post-Soviet countries that has survived a six-year civil war, so as the Tajik authorities cannot provide the Afghan refugees with the full package of social services, provided by the law. In addition, the income level in the country is low, the minimum wage consisting in 80 dollars a month. According to official data¹¹, over 40% of the active population (in total, 8 million) emigrated for employment, and more than a half of Tajik citizens live below the poverty limit, so giving shelter to Afghan refugees may be considered a burden for Dushanbe.

The role of European Union

We appreciate that the role and possibilities of the European Union to stimulate cooperation in and between Central Asia and Afghanistan, in the light of a changing regional context, is

¹¹More in „Как живут афганские беженцы в Таджикистане”, 2014. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/institutional/2014/07/140703_tadjikistan_refugees. Accessed at 04.08.2015.

less well-known. In 2007, the European Union set the main objectives and priority areas of its own Strategy on Central Asia, especially in terms of strengthening energy and trade relations, the cooperation in the security field and the sustainable management of natural resources, so as, in 2015¹², to be reiterated the role of dialogue to the highest level with the countries from Central Asia, of promoting and strengthening the efficiency and visibility of the Union in the region. Especially in the context of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the EU has to revise its approach and to find new ways for a closer coordination of its activity in Central Asia and Afghanistan, at least at the level of geopolitical models. Therefore, within the document, are exposed more consistently the objectives in the sphere of security and threats, as well as the willingness to extend „the activities in the neighboring areas of Afghanistan in cooperation with countries from Central Asia and international partners”¹³. It may be taken into account the fact that the EU has decided to considerably increase the global package dedicated to bilateral and regional cooperation between the EU and Central Asia for 2014-2020 (€ 1,068 billion, representing an increase of 56 %, in comparison with the period 2007-2013).

A considerable part of European support for Central Asia concerns the measures to fight against terrorism and drugs, and in terms of border management to help countries from this region to cope with the threats coming from Afghanistan. The EU finances the „Border Management Programme in Central Asia” (BOMCA), its purpose being to implement methods for integrated management of borders and to strengthen the regional cooperation by improving the infrastructure, replacing the equipment, training the personnel

¹² More in „Conclusions of European Union Council on the EU Strategy for Central Asia”, adopted at 22 iunie 2015. Available at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10191-2015-INIT/ro/pdf>. Accessed at 23.08.2015.

from border guards services and conducting joint actions. The EU also supports the „Central Asia Drug Action Programme” (CADAP), through which are developed measures to prevent and treat drug addiction, as well as the „Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Centre” (CARICC), developed with the purpose to strengthen the efforts to fight against drug trafficking.

However, the EU is expected to adopt a more consistent political position, which will link Central Asia to Afghanistan, to develop a new approach, more realistic, that will include the security threats that exist in each country from this area. And, last but not least, it is profitable a clear vision upon cooperation perspectives with other partners/important state actors from the region, that may especially mean the coordination of strategies regarding Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Conclusions

It will be difficult for any state or non-state actor to be consistent in its approach and actions in the long term regarding the Afghan challenges in Central Asia, if that actor does not take into consideration the expansion of international cooperation mechanisms. Each has the intention to be pragmatic, to support common values, and due to these facts are necessary the correct estimation of threats, finding solutions to promote constructive cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan and the participation in the long term of local institutions and organizations, especially of representatives of civil society, the only promoters of constant and long-term decisions. It can not be ignored the *de facto* geopolitical realities from Afghanistan, but the political models of different geopolitical players should be able to impose the development of viable platforms for security and stability in the region.

¹³ *Idem.*

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ОДКБ мобилизуется для ответа на «афганские» вызовы безопасности Центральной Азии, 2014. Disponibil la <http://eurazvitiye.org/publication/20141001-0>.