



## **As the Glaciers Melt: Climate Change and the Shifting Security Landscape Between Afghanistan and its Neighbours**

Briefing Seminar

*Tuesday, 19 September 2023, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM*

*EIAS Brussels and Online via Zoom*

### **REPORT**

On 19 September 2023, the European Institute for Asian Studies and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation jointly organized a briefing seminar under the topic “As the Glaciers Melt: Climate Change and the Shifting Security Landscape Between Afghanistan and its Neighbours” at the European Institute for Asian Studies in Brussels. The event delved into the discussion on the impact of climate change and transboundary water management on Afghanistan and its neighbours and the role international actors can play in maintaining regional stability. The event brought together a number of highly distinguished speakers and audiences onsite and online from different institutions and organizations from Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe.

In the opening remarks by Olaf Wientzek, Head of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Multinational Development Policy Dialogue in Brussels, Mr Wientzek commenced by acknowledging the pressing issue of the climate change-security nexus in Afghanistan and the larger Central Asia region. He emphasized the significant impact of hydro-diplomacy that it is indeed not a new concern but one that demands immediate attention. He also applauded the discussion and outcome of the expert roundtable on Hydro-Tensions and Hydro-Diplomacy Between Afghanistan and Its Neighbours, which was held a day before on 18 September 2023 at the KAS premises in Brussels. The roundtable produced practical approaches which are crucial for the way forward. Lastly, Mr Wientzek reaffirmed the KAS commitment and role as a bridge builder, not only for Afghanistan but for the entire Central Asia region.

This was followed by the opening Remarks by Mr Tomas Niklasson, EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan, who also stressed the importance of keeping Afghanistan on the map. His thoughts go to the Afghans who are living under resource limitations. He urged attendees to consider the long-term perspective rather than focusing solely on short-term solutions. He highlighted the need for humanitarian aid, especially for the two-thirds of Afghans in need of humanitarian assistance. Taliban's restrictions on women's work in NGOs and INGOs also have made it more difficult for assistance to reach those who are in need. He concluded by underlining that the EU stands for long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Mr Ismatulla Irgashev, Special Representative of the President of Uzbekistan for Afghanistan gave an introductory speech by sharing insights from his 40 years of experience working with



and for Afghan people, emphasizing Afghanistan's untapped potential. He highlighted the shared history and culture between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, contributing to the importance of shared regional development. Uzbekistan has played a role in restoring various sectors, particularly in roads connecting Central Asia to South Asia. Mr Irgashev therefore called upon the EU and the international community to support not only Afghanistan's water management capacity but also modern technology in the region. He concluded by advocating for peaceful coexistence with the people in the region.

The event was followed by a Panel Discussion moderated by Lin Goethals, Director of the European Institute for Asian Studies. The panel discussion featured three experts, Dr Martina Klimes, PhD. Advisor at the Water Cooperation and Diplomacy Department of the Stockholm International Water Institute highlighted the importance of water diplomacy. It is significantly crucial for the need to bridge technical and political aspects. While the political situation in Afghanistan remains unresolved, she stressed the urgency of finding solutions for the immediate implementation of water management. Dr Klimes called for investments in research and the reconnection of expertise in the country as there are significant economic losses in Central Asia due to mismanaged water resources. Dr Klimes urged parties to consider a "low-hanging fruit" approach as a practical start to further changes in Afghanistan.

The second panelist was Mr Jamal Abdul Naser Shokory, a Senior Researcher on Water and Climate Change at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. Shokory provided a technical perspective, emphasizing the need for more research and a common understanding of data regarding water management. He highlighted the urgency of action, given the melting glaciers in Afghanistan and the potential water scarcity in the next 50 years. He also stressed the importance of infrastructure development to cope with climate change, especially in the context of low water availability. He urged holistic research to understand how climate change affects both upstream and downstream regions and emphasized the need for capacity building and financial support.

As the third panelist Mr Tomas Niklasson, EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan, outlined the EU's contributions to Afghanistan, including humanitarian assistance and capacity building. The EU has a long history of assisting Central Asia and Afghanistan in capacity-building, investments, supporting innovation and technology, and contributing to fostering open dialogue for countries in the region and beyond. The EU's operational engagement aims to serve the interest of both the EU and of the Afghan people. Mr Niklasson echoed the importance of collaborative efforts and working together on finding practical solutions, particularly in agriculture and climate change.

The Q&A session extensively discussed topics related to various follow-up topics. The role of the EU in humanitarian assistance was further discussed, in which the panelists addressed that the impact of climate change and transboundary water management in Afghanistan and its



neighbors can be classified as a call for humanitarian assistance as drinking water is still scarce and requires immediate solutions. In response to the question of how the private sector can support Afghanistan the panelists expressed that the private sector is playing a role of importance in supporting Afghanistan. However, the lack of legal guarantees and restrictions by the current regime made access to the private sector difficult. In conclusion, climate change, resource security, infrastructure and transboundary water management are holistic and interrelated issues that require not only technical solutions but also social and political aspiration alignment.

The seminar concluded with a sense of urgency and commitment to address the complex challenges posed by climate change, transboundary water management, and regional stability in Afghanistan and the broader Central Asia region. “Either we are part of the solution or the problem”, highlighting the need for immediate action, cooperation, and investment to mitigate potential conflicts and ensure sustainable development in Afghanistan and the region.