Documentation
Afghanistan. Deported hope.

Diplomatic Academy of Vienna
6 March 2017

Edited by Ali Ahmad and Michael Fanizadeh
Content

Michael Fanizadeh ................................................................. 4

Timor Sharan ........................................................................ 7

Horia Mosadiq ........................................................................ 13

Panel Discussion ..................................................................... 17

Audience: Q&A ...................................................................... 19
Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to today’s panel discussion “Afghanistan. Deported hope.” We are very pleased to see so many people here and I am very happy to welcome our distinguished speakers from Afghanistan Horia Mosadiq and Dr. Timor Sharan. Welcome!

I’m also very glad to welcome Sibylle Hamann, an independent journalist from Austria, who will chair today’s panel discussion. She will later also briefly introduce our speakers. I have organized today’s event with our Afghanistan consultant at VIDC, Dr. Ali Ahmad, whom I would like to thank for his collaboration.

I would also like to thank the Afghan cultural associations AKIS, KATIB, Afghan Wulas and Afghan Watan, as well as the group “Afghanische Jugendliche-NEUER START in Österreich”, the Afghan Women Association in Austria and the Afghan association Interkulturelles Entwicklungscentrum, which supported us with distributing information about today’s event. Thank you very much for this. I hope that I have not forgotten any of the numerous Afghan associations who are very active and supportive for newly arriving Afghans and refugees getting started in Austria. I want to specially thank you, the associations, for this important work. Much more of this work is needed and much more of official recognition and support would be appreciated.

A special thanks to the Austrian Development Cooperation, the Austrian Development Agency, which financed today’s event, and my colleagues at VIDC, who actively supported me with organizing, as well as the Diplomatic Academy for the excellent cooperation, as usual. You realized that today’s talk and discussion will be held in English and translated simultaneously into German. I would like to thank Ms. Gallo and Mr. Musyl, our interpreters for today, for their challenging work. Thank you.

Today’s event is part of our focus on the situation in the Middle East and the background for today’s event is quite clear:

From January 2015 to the end of 2016, more than 37,000 people from Afghanistan applied for asylum in Austria. According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior 48% of the
applications received a positive decision in 2016 (incl. subsidiary protection and for humanitarian reasons). More than half of the Afghan refugees remain without status until further notice. The situation is similar in other European countries, such as in Germany where the total protection rate of Afghan asylum seekers was 55% in 2016. 

Three weeks ago the EU ratified a readmission agreement with Afghanistan to deport the rejected asylum seekers as a pre-condition for 1.2 billion of Euros for aid projects per year until 2020. Afghanistan thereby agreed to readmit rejected Afghan asylum seekers; the number of people to be deported from the EU to Afghanistan was reported as 80,000.

But what is the situation like for deported refugees in Afghanistan? Often they have lost all of their possessions or sold them to flee, and now they have to live under very difficult social and political conditions. Official figures assume that 1.2 million internally displaced people live in Afghanistan, in addition there are deported Afghans from Pakistan and Iran. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 250,000 people had to return to Afghanistan from Pakistan since January 2016 and almost half a million from Iran.

Very difficult, indeed very challenging, but we have wonderful experts here to discuss these issues. Therefore I stop here and I will hand over to our moderator Sibylle Hamann.

As said before Sibylle Hamann is an independent journalist, she has a weekly column in the Austrian newspaper „Die Presse“, and she is a permanent writer for „Falter“ and „Emma“. Amongst others she is chief editor of „Liga. Zeitschrift für Menschenrechte“, and lecturer for journalism at the Fachhochschule Wien. From 1995-2006 she has worked in the foreign office of the weekly magazine „Profil“ and during this period she has also visited Afghanistan.

***
Sibylle Hamann

Thank you very much indeed for this brief introduction. “Deported Hope” is the title of our evening and this contains two words that all Afghan refugees have got to know very well during these last two years. Hope was what they had when they set off to Europe and deportation back home is what many of them fear at this point. Michael already mentioned the numbers, about 40,000 Afghans have asked for asylum in Austria. Half of them are still in limbo over their status. What is the perspective for them? What is the perspective for the millions of others who still live in Pakistan and Iran? What is the perspective for those many who are still in Afghanistan not knowing if this is a place whether they can stay? And what does all of this mean for us here in Europe? We are here to discuss these and many other questions with our two distinguished guests whom I would like to welcome.

Horia Mosadiq is an Afghan human rights activist and journalist with 23 years of experience working in Afghanistan and the region. She has been working for the international office of Amnesty International as an expert on Afghanistan since 2008. Prior to this she worked for several governmental and non-governmental institutions in Afghanistan. She also represented Afghanistan in 2007 at the 51st UN Commission on the Status of Women. In 2007 Mosadiq won the Afghan human rights award and in 2011 she was named one of the 50 most courageous women in the world by Britain’s Glamour Magazine. Amnesty International gave her the Women Rights Defender Award in 2012 and 2015, and the Open Asia/Armanshahr Foundation recognized her for her outstanding commitment to human rights in 2015. In 2013, Mosadiq founded the Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization (SRMO), which supports the work of human rights and women’s rights defenders in unsafe provinces in Afghanistan.

Timor Sharan is the Afghanistan Senior Analyst for International Crisis Group, based in Kabul. Prior to this, Mr. Sharan was the Director of Program Management Unit at The Asia Foundation in Kabul. He also worked as the political economy advisor and aid effectiveness expert for a number of the UK Department for International Development (DfID) and USAID projects in Afghanistan. Educated at Cambridge, as well as Essex University, Mr. Sharan holds...
a PhD in political economy of international statebuilding from University of Exeter, with a specialisation in economic and political development and institution-building. He writes regular policy articles on Afghanistan and the wider regional dynamics that shape conflict in the country for Foreign Policy and Politico and other policy outlets and appears in news outlets including New York Times, Guardian and Wall Street Journal. He founded an NGO with the name “Khedmat”. Timor Sharan will give us an overview on the current situation specifically concerning returning refugees.

***

**Timor Sharan**

Thank you so much for that generous introduction. Let me begin by thanking the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) for organizing this fantastic event and inviting me to talk about the Afghan refugee crisis. It is such a pleasure to be at the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, an institute that trains some of the best diplomats in Europe and more importantly an institute commissioned by a woman, by Maria Theresia.

I will be talking about the scale and magnitude of the refugee crisis in Afghanistan and highlight some of the key challenges refugees, in particularly deportees from European countries, are facing. And I will set a number of recommendations that we think, at International Crisis Group, needs to be done. What I am presenting here is part of our latest report and ongoing working paper on the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan’s last forty years of history is one of conflict, refugee crisis, displacement and people on the move, people are constantly on the move. On this picture you see Mirwais Basharpal. Mirwais Basharpal is 30 years old, from Kama district of Nangarhar province, in east Afghanistan, where currently ISIS and Taliban are fighting. He was a refugee. He lived in Pakistan during the Cold War, the fighting
between the Soviet-backed regime and the Western-backed Mujahiddin. He came back to Afghanistan in 2001 after the American intervention, after that they lived for three years in Moscow, in Russia, and then again they returned to Afghanistan. After threat on his life in 2015, he escaped from Afghanistan with his family again, two sons and two daughters and he claimed asylum in November 2015 in Norway, a year later in October 2016, police officers walked to his house and deported him, his wife and the four children.

On this picture you see Najib and his family. He is 40 years old from Ghazni province in central Afghanistan with a lefty family background. He was displaced from his village and moved to Kabul during the communist regime. When the Taliban came to Kabul in 1995, he then left for Iran. He lived illegally in Iran for twenty years. After twenty years, he was expelled along with his family from Iran. He settled in Herat. In 2015 again he had to escape from Afghanistan and claim asylum in Norway on 23 September of 2015. Six months later, in the middle of the night, he was taken out by the police along with his family and he was deported back to Afghanistan.

Like Basharpal and Najib millions of Afghans had been on the move from one refugee country to another; 10 million refugees over the past 40 years. In fact one in three Afghans has been a refugee in their lifetime. In 1990s, at the height of the refugee crisis 6 million Afghans were refugees, 96% were in Iran and Pakistan. In 2016, 16 years after the American intervention, the European intervention, we have around 4.4 million refugees’ undocumented in Pakistan and Iran. The reason that I am giving you these data is to simply understand the magnitude and the scale of the crisis that Afghans have been going through for years and decades. It is not an issue; it is not a crisis that started in 2015 in Europe.

In January the Afghan government and humanitarian organizations conducted a study, and according to that study 9.3 million Afghans are in need of assistance in 2017. Therefore they were asking for 530 million dollars assistance. About 40% of Afghan population live beyond the health care reach at the moment. 1.75 million suffer severe food insecurity and one million children are malnourished. That is the scale of the crisis that Afghanistan is facing.
What are the drivers of the refugee crisis especially for the past few years? We know one over the last four decades, which is the long-lasting Afghan conflict dating back to Cold War, Mujahiddin era, the American intervention and now the regional power struggle and the worsening security situation. The Taliban and other insurgency groups are expanding in the country. Last year major cities like Kunduz city in the north, fell for the second time to the Taliban. This year we estimate at ICG that cities like Kunduz are likely to fall. And other cities in the south, in the north-east are becoming more and more vulnerable. According to the Special Investigative General for Afghanistan on reconstruction (SIGAR), only 63% of the country is in the government’s hand, the rest is in armed insurgents hands. Last year the Afghan National Army, Defence and Security Forces had in total 18,500 casualties. Around six and a half thousand dead and around 12,000 injured. We literally lost around 20,000 of our soldiers in the battlefield against ISIS and against the Taliban and that number is going to increase. As a sign of the worsening situation on 9 February Gen. John W. Nicholson, Resolute Support and the US’s Afghanistan commander, testified in the Senate that we must increase the number of troops to avoid the collapse of the Afghan state and break the ongoing stalemate. ISIS has established a footprint in eastern Afghanistan and they are increasingly targeting the Shi’a communities and ethnic Hazaras in particular: Last year several suicide attacks tried to create a sectarian violence in the country.

The second reason for the refugee crisis is the emergence of a complex regional security dimension and push factors from Pakistan as the Afghan president put it; we are in a undeclared war with Pakistan. As the Americans and the European countries withdrew from Afghanistan, neighbouring countries including Pakistan, Russia and Iran are becoming more and more active and trying to create a similar scenario to Syria in Afghanistan. A nightmare we must work hard to avoid it. Over the past two years, the Pakistani authorities have used Afghan refugees to put economic and political pressure on Afghanistan. Last year it expelled more than half a million people in six months time back to Afghanistan, stretching the Afghan government resources to provide services for these people. This year alone, the Afghan government is expecting around 600,000 returnees from Pakistan. And over the last twenty days, the Afghan-Pakistan crossing border is closed. And the Pakistanis have been
shelling the Afghan side for the past two weeks. So you could understand the extent and complexity of the Afghan conflict and how it is going to evolve in the next couple of years.

Now I’m moving on to specifically talk about the Afghan asylum seekers in Europe: 2015 saw the highest number of Afghans claiming asylum in Europe, around 200,000. Most of them settled in Germany, in Greece, in Scandinavian countries and around 37,000 in Austria. With the European deal with Turkey, that number has significantly reduced. We see 80% of decline in number of Afghans entering Europe. What happened in 2015 is a reflective of the national mood. “The Survey of the Afghan People”, a survey conducted by the Asia Foundation, found that the reason that most of the Afghans are leaving is insecurity followed by unemployment, but the primary reason is insecurity. People think that the direction of the country is unfortunately going in the wrong direction.

Who is leaving Afghanistan? Contrary to your assumption, most of those who are leaving are young men, educated, urban Afghans mostly singles. In fact we are losing our workforce. We are facing a serious brain drain in Afghanistan.

Let me finally talk about the EU deal and the challenges that refugees are facing. In October 2016, the European Union signed an agreement with the Afghan government to deport 10,000 people on yearly basis back to the country. In return the European countries promised 3.5 billion dollar development aid. In fact countries like Norway and Germany threatened the Afghan State, if they do not accept these failed asylum seekers, they would cut their development aid. As you imagine, the President had no choice but to accept that. But again there is a lot of controversy around this deal. The rationale that European countries are sending Afghans back is that certain parts of the country are safe. We think differently at ICG. We think that this does not reflect the realities on the ground and I would like to discuss this in a bit more details.

What are some of the immediate challenges that returnees from Europe face? The first and the immediate challenge is the increasing level of insecurity. The Afghan government is unable to guarantee the safety of the people who are coming back. On the third night that Basharpal family arrived in Afghanistan, there was a suicide attack 100 meters from their hotel where they were staying. The other case that I highlighted, Najib, he was in Supreme Court last month where there was a suicide attack outside the Supreme Court and he was
held for two hours there. The number of suicide attacks in the country and in major cities like Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Nangarhar is increasing. Just last week we had two suicide attacks in Kabul, which killed over 30 people and injured many. On 7 February we had a suicide bomb exploded outside the Supreme Court again, which killed 21 people and 40 injured. On 10 January we had two explosions took place outside the parliament killing 50 people and injuring more than 100 Afghans. Particular notable was the attack against the American University. Last year we also saw three suicide attacks against demonstrators predominantly Shiites in July last year targeting specifically for their religious belief. According to the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 2016 alone there were 7,162 civilian death and 11,418 injured. In January the UN security agencies reported 1,810 security incidents across Afghanistan in one month alone.

Why Afghanistan is not safe? Because the security situation is fluid, no part of the country is safe. Highways that used to be safe are no longer safe. I travelled to Nangarhar and Laghman ten days ago, there was an attack on the highway and my team and I had to escape. Last year there were four kidnappings alone on the street where my office is located. One of them was just two weeks ago. Also according to the US State Department Afghanistan is not safe: “Travel to all areas of Afghanistan remains unsafe due to the ongoing risk of kidnapping, hostage taking, military combat operations, landmines, banditry, armed rivalry between political and tribal groups, militant attacks, direct and indirect fire, suicide bombings, and insurgent attacks, including attacks using vehicle-borne or other improvised explosive devices (IED) (...) Extremists associated with various Taliban networks, ISIS, and members of other armed opposition groups are active throughout the country.”

The second challenge that most deportees are facing is accommodation. Families like Basharpal and Najib struggled with accommodation in major cities. For months Basharpal searched for a new place so that they could settle. But increasingly more and more people are displaced in Afghanistan, the rent prices in major cities are increasing and there is a lot of burden on cities. Most returnees settle in 12 Km of cities, in an unplanned, in informal urban settlements in the cities. The housing sector, ask any humanitarian organisation working in Afghanistan, is in complete crisis. It is dysfunctional.

The third problem that most of Afghan returnees are facing is unemployment and the worsening economy. Both Basharpal and Najib could not find job for a year. Unemployment
stands at the moment at 35-40% with additional 300.000 – 400.000 young Afghans in the job market and a small private sector that is only 10-15% of our GDP. But more importantly is the trauma and psychological problem that the deportees are facing. This strong element of rejection, of un-desire is some of the concerns, some of the challenges that their children are facing. They feel a strong sense of guilt. Basharpal did not go back to his village. He didn’t even inform his relatives that he had arrived. He had felt a strong sense of shame, a shame that he had been rejected, that he could not rely on his family, on his relatives.

Finally in terms of moving forward: What we are seeing in Europe is politics of fear and what EU politicians are doing is making a political response to a humanitarian crisis. Giving the worsening of the security situation and a real threat of the Afghan state to collapse; we believe that forced deportation of refugees must stop on humanitarian basis, on human rights ground. The Germans have sent three charter flights back to Kabul. On one flight there were 18, on another 24, and on the other one 25 people with 70 - 80 police officers. We believe each charter flight is costing around 150.000 dollars. So it is going to cost European countries a lot of money to send these people back. In fact three days ago, we had a case of a Scandinavian country who deported three Afghans on a charter flight back to Kabul, just three.

We think the best solution to resolve the Afghan refugee crisis is in fact ending the conflict in Afghanistan. It is not that the Afghans started this conflict. You go through 40 years of fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism; very few Afghans were involved in attacks in Europe. I think the best would be, if the international community including Austria and the others maintain the military and financial support for Afghanistan and ensure that the country doesn’t deteriorate further. Finally let me conclude by saying as Basharpal put it: “There is nothing sweeter than living in your own country, but only if you have peace.”

Thank you.

***
Horia Mosadiq

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Before I start my speech, I would like to thank again the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation for inviting me to this very important event. At the same time, I am very pleased to see so many Afghan fellows here. My heart is overwhelmed with happiness and joy to see so many Afghans who are coming here to listen about their own country.

As it was discussed, I am going to speak about internally displaced people in Afghanistan. As my fellow colleague Mr. Sharan already mentioned, being a refugee or being an internally displaced is unfortunately not a new issue for any Afghan. I was a child when war started in Afghanistan and Russia invaded. I grew up in war and I have seen nothing but displacement, being a refugee, leaving my homeland and seeing so many human rights violations that happen at different levels of Afghanistan from north to south, from east to west. I don’t remember any parts of Afghanistan which wasn’t really touched by war and I don’t know any single Afghan who haven’t been affected by the consequences of war in the country whether by losing a family member or whether by being displaced and carrying the burden of war. We were killed by the weapons that we have not produced. Our homes were destroyed by the bombs that we never played any role in making it, in bringing it or in dropping it and this is the reality of every Afghan’s life. And when many westerners are asking me why you are always addressing this to the western countries, to the donors, and why you speak less to the Afghan government or Afghans? Because you westerners owe Afghans a lot, because you started to support Mujahidin groups back in the 1980s when Russia invaded Afghanistan. You were the ones who provided weapons and started the expansion of Islamisation in the region. You were the ones who used Afghanistan as a tool for gaining Cold War over Russia. This is why you owe us and you will still owe us. Before getting too much into the depth of the crisis that we are facing in Afghanistan, I want to go back to the topic that I was supposed to speak, about the internally displaced people in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately by the end of 2016, we had around 1.4 million Afghans who were internally displaced. The majority of them were displaced because of the conflict. We also have some
Afghans who were displaced because of natural disaster and because of other issues, but the majority of them were displaced because of the conflict. Amnesty International conducted a research which I was part of in 2012. At that time, we found half a million Afghans were internally displaced. Two years later when we went back, the numbers was nearly tripled and on average everyday 1,500 Afghans are displaced and they are mainly displaced because of the conflict around the country.

When we speak about internally displaced people, who are they? They are the most vulnerable people who cannot afford to make a bit of life. They are displaced simply because of war, because of human right violations, because of insecurity and because of natural disaster. Only the privileged ones can make to have a decent house and to live in a dignified way, but the poorest of the poor are the ones who are living in IDPs’ settlements across Afghanistan. Many of them are living in extremely hard conditions, as you may see in some of these pictures. And what you see on these pictures are much better settlements compare to many others.

In a temperature of more than 40 degrees in summer and below 10 degrees in the winters, these women, children and elderly are living under just plastic sheets. These settlements are at the heart of Kabul. I am not talking about settlements in rural parts of Afghanistan.

By looking into these pictures you can also imagine how the situation will be in rural areas where displacement has happened. When I walked to one of the rooms to meet and talk to one of the displaced people back in 2015, automatically water and mud started a kind of emerging beneath my feet. This was the room that a family with six children and a pregnant woman was living. This woman who you see, as soon as I started speaking with her, she was so emotional that she started crying and she said: “Do you know, since I became displaced, I think I lost all my dignity. I cannot face my relatives; I don’t tell anyone where we live, because of shame that I cannot face other people who will see me living in such a condition.”
This is one of the streets of Kabul just attached to the IDPs’ settlement. On rainy days this is what happens and there is often water quite near to a meter surrounding the whole area, and this is the place where many of these people have to walk to fetch water, to bring food and to do their daily work. And at the same time, as Mr. Sharan also mentioned before, more than half a million Afghans were forcefully returned from Pakistan in 2016 alone. And these people who were forcefully returned, the majority of them are again in these settlements for IDPs across Afghanistan. Whether the areas that they belong to are too insecure to go or there is a lack of infrastructures or simply other issues or problems that make their return almost impossible. And what they really do for their living, most of their children are whether begging or are working as cheap child labor in the market.

For example, in CHamann-e Babrak in Kabul, it is just attached to the vegetable market and many of these children go and work during the day as porter: What can they do with the very little money they are earning and cannot make a living? By the end of the day they go through the waste vegetables that were thrown away by the traders. They would only fetch the ones that are less rotten and they will bring it home and they will eat it. Sometimes they cook and sometimes because they don’t have gas, cooking oil and other things, so they just eat it raw. One of the IDP families told me that if they get just one meal a day, they are the luckiest family of that day.

When we were investigating the situation of IDPs in Kabul especially in CHamann-e Babrak, there were no water resources for the IDPs, there were no water resources in Charahi Qambar (Qambar square), there were no water resources in Bagh-e Dawood, Bagrami factory and many other places; simply because for the Afghan government digging water well means a way of settlement, a way of ownership. They don’t allow that to happen. What happens?

Many of these IDPs pay for a gallon of water 50 Afs. And 50 Afs is close to 20 Eurocents, but they are earning only 200 Afs per day. One of the woman IDPs was telling me that if you look at the children in this settlement, their hair color has gone yellow. It is not because they are
dying it out of fashion, they are not using cosmetics to look beautiful, there is a lack of iron and a lack of water and they have not washed themselves for months. This is why they are looking blond.
Seasonal sicknesses are common during hot summers and cold winters and unfortunately the majority of casualties during these seasonal whether infants or elderly people are dying because of excessive heat or excessive cold and access to health services are very limited. In Afghanistan the government is entitled to provide free health care, but what does free health care means, when you have to queue in government-run hospitals with no equipment for hours and hours, and still you still need to buy and pay for your own medication.

At the same time you may ask that Afghanistan has a ministry of refugees and repatriation. What is this ministry doing? Unfortunately the ministry is extremely under-resources. There is very little political will at the Afghan government level to support the ministry of refugees and repatriation. The total annual budget for the ministry of refugees and repatriation is seven million dollars, which includes both development and operational budget. Even with that money, if you do nothing else just spend it on the Afghan IDPs, you still have around four dollars per refugee per year. And unfortunately many donors they are willingly spending all their money on other places but they are very much reluctant to spend on IDPs. When Amnesty International released its report on IDPs in 2012, it resulted in the establishment of a national IDPs policy in Afghanistan, but unfortunately two years later when we reinvestigated, that policy largely remained on paper and nothing has been done, just like many other laws including equal rights of men and women in the Afghan constitution.

The question which I am always asked by many journalists especially in the EU is: Is it right for EU countries to deport back Afghan refugees? For all reasons I mentioned I would say NO. It is because of the lack of the infrastructures, it is because of the threats that every civilian is facing in their lives. And also the Afghan government simply does not have the capacity to host and to provide services for these refugees. We are already coping with more than half a million deportees from Pakistan. We are already coping with more than 1.4 million internally displaced people, and you have seen their living conditions. How we are going to cope with the refugees who are returned and deported from Europe. When Europe
signed that memorandum of understanding with the Afghan government, I spoke with one of the ministers in Afghanistan and he told me: “The EU forced us to drink a cup of poison. For us it was a situation of life and death. Whether we sign that deal and accept the deported Afghan refugees and we receive the aid, or we sacrifice the 30 million Afghans who are living in Afghanistan and who are highly dependent on the international funding.” Aid should be given to poor countries like Afghanistan unconditionally.

Thank you!

***

Panel Discussion

**Hamann:** Thank you very much indeed. I am sure everybody in this room has a lot of questions and I would like you all to prepare. But please give me the chance to ask my own questions first. I would like to start with one important message that I got from both of your presentations. Many politicians in Europe think that when we send Afghans back home, they just go home and go on with their daily lives as it was before. But the message that I am getting from you is that those returnees are in a specifically vulnerable situation. You mentioned shame, guilt, they also sold their property, they are in debt probably, and the families are totally disrupted. Could you maybe elaborate on this misunderstanding?

**Sharan:** Thank you for this wonderful question. There is no doubt that when people are deported from Europe, they are often become very vulnerable and this vulnerability you can see at several levels. One is the financial as you mentioned. Going back means that they have lost everything. More importantly is this element of shame that is quite strong. The third I would say is the fact that the children have been introduced to European Culture and suddenly going back creates a cultural shock. The identity crisis is overwhelming for a lot of these children. We need to see and understand the impact of deportation of Afghans back. Maybe we could understand Afghans who have committed crimes to be sent back, that
might be understandable, but from a human rights perspective we also need to understand the contribution that the Afghan refugees could do in the long run in Europe and in European countries in terms of diversity, in terms of financial contribution and the fact that the next generation will enrich the Austrian culture.

**Hamann:** You mentioned that mostly the educated and the brightest leave first. So wouldn’t you need these people specifically to help Afghanistan, to build the new Afghanistan?

**Mosadiq:** Definitely we need them, but unfortunately they are also the ones who are most under the threat because of who they are. The attack on the American University in Kabul was not a coincident. It wasn’t a coincident either because since then the University is closed. And the students are looking for any other alternative and go and study. The most intellectual, the most intelligent and the most educated are also the ones who are the most being targeted for who they are. But for me as an Afghan, it seems terrible to support brain-drain and I would never ever support any brain-drain, but at the same time looking at all these young people sitting here in this auditorium, I would rather see them alive here than seeing them dead in Afghanistan, because we want to keep these brains. We don’t want these brains under earth, we don’t want these brains in graves, and we want these brains to be alive and to contribute to the construction of Afghanistan.

***
Audience: Q&A

Q: Welcome Ms. Mosadiq and Dr. Sharan. The Afghan government is one of the most corrupted governments in the world and the government is not even able to keep peace in the capital city. Four days ago the Enlightened Movement wanted to hold the 22nd anniversary for Abdul Ali Mazari in Kabul, who was the leader of the Hazara people - Taliban killed him. The person in charge of the security in Kabul city rejected and said: The security forces cannot guarantee security and now you want to send refugees back?

Q: Since 2002 the USA and Europe have spent a billion of Euros to support Afghanistan. But we could not see a positive development in the country; on the contrary it’s getting worse and worse. Do you know where the money is gone?

Q: Unfortunately the European politicians tend to misuse the refugee question for their own purposes. My question is for both panelists: According to statistics, the international community has helped Afghanistan since 2002 with more than 57 billion dollars and just in 2016 more than 13.6 billion was promised for the next four years. If you distribute this money throughout the Afghan community, it will feed lots of people for many days. Do you have statistics on this?

Q: There has been a deal between Afghanistan and the EU, and based on this deal, they have agreed that a new terminal should be built in Kabul. Is this terminal good for Afghanistan?

Hamann: Let’s start with this last question.

Sharan: You are right; the European deal is specifically referring to the establishment of a terminal at the Kabul airport. As you know, we are facing a lot of challenges when refugees
are deported; they are stranded at Kabul airport. And there would be a zero point where the returnees will be accepted as it is now currently done by the Afghan authorities. If they are settling in Kabul, then they will be directed to Kabul, if not outside, then they would be put on a flight to other cities in Afghanistan. So that is what the EU deal is making reference to. Why international agencies are sending people back? That would be exactly talked here. One thing that I would encourage my Afghan colleagues is to understand the complexity of decision making in Europe. It involves the perception of the population, how people in Vienna think? How people in Austria think? How people in Europe think? And how political parties are reflecting these thinking. Considering this machinery of policy making, the Afghan community should engage more and should use the wonderful space in democratic processes. Express your plight and the suffering that refugees are facing. That is also one of the reasons that we have the discussion this evening.

Hamann: Many of the Afghan refugees here in Austria are Hazara. And for many Austrians this is the first time we have been confronted with this issue, because we know little about it. We have heard about radicalization, about radical Islamic forces targeting the Hazara minority specifically. Could you please elaborate on that, on the specific persecution and vulnerability of the Hazara minority?

Sharan: As Hazara maybe I go first. We had this conversation not to ethicize this matter and I am not going to do that, but let me give you some historical background about the Hazaras. The Hazaras are predominantly Turko-Mongul and I use that specifically because they are a combination of lots of ethnicities, which includes the Uzbeks, the Kazakhs, the Kirgiz and others. It is a confederation of a lot of different ethnic groups, Turkic and Mongul ethnic groups, but simply come together because of two very reasons: One is language; they predominantly speak Dari, Persian. And secondly, their religion, they are predominantly Shi’a, 80% of them are Shiites. The Hazaras have been under persecution for the last two centuries. They have a very strong sense of victimhood which is understandable from a minority that has been prosecuted.
Mosadiq: If I understood correctly, our colleague mentioned the recent commemoration of Mazari’s death in Kabul which was stopped by the Afghan government. It was just last week in Kabul. So I agree with you that a government which cannot maintain the protection of its citizens inside its capital, Kabul, cannot provide protection at all. How they will be able to provide protection for big groups of people who are deported and returned from Europe and other countries? At the same time, I would say that unfortunately this is not a single case, many people lost any hope of getting protection from their government.

Second, I would like to speak about the terminal that you spoke about. This is mainly a reception center that will be built within Kabul airport, which will accommodate deported Afghan refugees who will stay there for some time when they will be screened; later on they will be sent to their places of origins or they will be resettled in Kabul. Simply it will be built for Afghan deportees from Europe by European money and there will be kept as guest for some time. At the time being, this service is provided by IOM and they are keeping Afghan deportees for two weeks in their guest houses around Kabul. And after two weeks unfortunately, they are they are sent back to find their own future.

Hamann: I would like to move on with the money issue and here I want to remind us on the word protection, because protection was one of the key promises of the foreign forces when they moved into Afghanistan. They would bring protection, and security, build police forces, train the armed forces and millions and millions of dollars have been poured into the country to get this done. What happened with the money?

Sharan: In 2001 the rationale was that we abandoned Afghanistan in 1992 when the Soviet-supported regime collapsed. This time we won’t make that mistake. So we all remember that. A lot of money went to Afghanistan but I think around 80% of that money went to security of around 800 small, medium and large military camps that the Americans and Europeans built around the country - 800. So a lot of that money went to security. That is something we need to understand. And we have to consider that a lot of money did return to Western countries. According to Oxfam, who did a study in 2008, around 60 - 65% of the money that the Europeans and Americans were committing to Afghanistan went back to
Western countries, through consulting works, through hiring contractors etc. Very little of that money has gone to key infrastructures, such as dam, electricity, mining etc.

**Mosadiq:** Unfortunately when USA and the West invaded Afghanistan in 2001, they had no strategy for Afghanistan. What were they thinking? We will go, bomb, Taliban will run away and we will go back? Suddenly when the Taliban was defeated, the UK and the USA are left alone with Afghanistan and they didn’t know what to do with the country. This is why they went to the Bonn Conference and they brought the same human rights perpetrators and local warlords to set an agenda for the future of Afghanistan. This is where it went wrong. They allowed the same human rights violators to become part of the Afghan government and to shape the government of Afghanistan.

Again they used women as a symbol of freedom and liberation in Afghanistan. I think the issue of women and human rights became extremely politicized in the agenda of the donor community and whenever it served their interest it was used. At the same time I don’t want to dismiss that nothing has been done. Now we have at least more than 25% of the women are represented in the parliament of Afghanistan, which have never been the case in the past, even not during the peace time in Afghanistan. We have more than 35% of girls going back to education and back to school and we have many women who are working as TV presenters, as businesswomen, as ministers, deputy ministers and politicians and we didn’t have that quantity of women in the past, which is all great and good news.

Yes, there were some reconstruction going on in Afghanistan but unfortunately as Mr. Sharan mentioned, the majority of that money went back to Western countries. It was spent on security infrastructure and on high salaries. I give you an example, when you hire an international consultant in Afghanistan, you will pay a minimum wage of 10.000 US dollars per month but this is not enough. You have to pay for his/her security, you have to pay for accommodation, and you have to pay for certain other things which add up to 30.000 - 50.000 US dollars per month.

***