

Hungarian participation in NATO's mission in Afghanistan changing

Based on the Government decision of August 23, 2012, Hungarian contribution to the rebuilding of Afghanistan is about to go through significant transition. The process will be in accordance with the priorities of the NATO-led ISAF mission and is the result of the already achieved goals in Afghanistan and Baghlan province. In the upcoming months Hungary will wind down its active participation in the Hungarian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Baghlan Province, and will start taking part in providing security in and around Kabul International Airport from October 2012. At the same time Hungarian Defence Forces will further raise its involvement in the training and mentoring of the Afghan National Security Forces.

Since 2003 Hungary has actively participated in the international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. The involvement of the international community started in 2001 and is technically being implemented within the framework of the NATO led ISAF mission based on UN Security Council Resolution 1386. Currently, involving 50 contributing states and approximately 130 000 soldiers, the mission is the biggest priority for the alliance and aims at stopping Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for international terrorist groups. At the same time, the international community strives to assure the required security level and political conditions needed for the peace and prosperity in the country. These goals can only be achieved by deploying the required amount of civilian development funds and by building a capable Afghan security force which will finally be able to take over ISAF's role in the country. The NATO-led operation is foreseen to end in 2014, therefore, with the anticipated termination of the ISAF mission the role of the participating states is about to go through significant transition. The assistance in the rebuilding of Afghanistan will be implemented in the form of a different mission with new roles. It will mainly focus on training, advising and supporting the Afghan government and security forces.

Hungary supports the stabilization of Afghanistan in accordance with its resource capabilities. Through its participation in this process Hungary demonstrates that the country is not only a consumer of the benefits provided by NATO and EU membership but is also an active member of both international organizations. Based on the previously mentioned goals, Hungary's participation in Afghanistan is being built on two main pillars. Pillar 1 stands for reconstruction and development efforts along with humanitarian assistance in Baghlan province, provided by the Hungarian-led PRT, while Pillar 2 stands for the tasks implemented throughout the training and mentoring of the Afghan National Security Forces.

Hungary's co-operation with the Afghan Government and state in the field of development assistance dates back to the year of 2003 as well. With its involvement in the Baghlan PRT the co-operation between the two countries has reached a higher level even in the field of development assistance. Afghanistan has become Hungary's priority in this regard. The so called civilian contingent of the Hungarian-led PRT consists of a political and a development advisor, both responsible for the co-ordination of the Hungarian development efforts in the province. As a result of their contribution – besides many other donors – Hungary alone has provided and channeled 13 million USD of funds into the province since 2007. These funds were mainly spent on capacity building of public servants and services and also on the health and agriculture sectors.

The European Union launched its police mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) in 2007. Hungary currently contributes to this mission with 8 police officers serving in Afghanistan. The aim of the mission is to support the establishment of sustainable and effective civil policing arrangements that will ensure appropriate interaction with the wider criminal justice system under Afghan ownership.

In accordance with the changing operational priorities, and also based on the request of NATO, Hungary will reshape its participation in the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan in the year of 2012. By these fundamental changes our aim is to assure our effective support to achieving the goal set by the international community. Although our roles might be changing, Hungary is still dedicated to the „in together, out together” principle supported by the NATO member states, regarding the operation in Afghanistan. As after 2014 NATO is planning to launch a new mission with the aim of providing logistical and technical-financial support for the Afghan Government, at this point we can already anticipate that the Hungarian participation in the process of rebuilding Afghanistan will carry on even after 2014. In this respect, the Hungarian Government has already committed itself to provide 500,000 USD financial support to the Afghan security forces for three years starting as of 2015.

Based on the decision of the Hungarian Government, our participation in the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan will be reshaped. The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghlan Province will be handed over by the beginning of March 2013. With this step we will close down an important phase of our involvement in the stabilization of Afghanistan. Our work has successfully been done, we have effectively supported the development of Baghlan Province and have also improved the living conditions of the inhabitants of the province. The Hungarian-American Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLT) based in Khilagay will stay in the province until the Afghan army battalion under their responsibility will reach full operational capability. Once this has been achieved, the OMLT will transform into a Military Advisory Team (MAT) and provide further support for Afghanistan’s armed forces.

Parallel to the handing over of the Baghlan PRT, Hungary will – for the third time since 2006 – once again take part in providing security in and around Kabul International Airport (KAIA) from October 2012. We will also maintain the presence of our special forces, along with the Mi-17 Air Advisory Team, the Mi-35 Air Mentor Team and the Logistic Mentor Team all taking part in the training and mentoring of the Afghan armed forces. Hungary currently has approximately 400 soldiers stationed in Afghanistan, but this number is expected to decrease in 2013. In accordance with the plans of the EU we will also maintain our participation in the EUPOL Afghanistan mission.

As Hungary’s relationship with Afghanistan is going through fundamental changes, more elements of the conventional diplomatic relations are expected to be introduced in the two country’s bilateral relationship from 2014. This process will include the mutually beneficial economic, trade, educational and cultural co-operation among the two countries. The opening of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Budapest in July 2012 can be seen as a cornerstone of this process.