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New Afghan President sworn in: a lot of major challenges ahead

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On September 29, 2014, the new Afghan President was officially sworn in, international news agencies are reporting. “Ashraf Ghani has been sworn in as the new president of Afghanistan in a lavish ceremony at the presidential palace in Kabul, ending months of turmoil over a fraud tainted election”, *Al Jazeera* reports. Ghani told his compatriots: “I am not better than anyone from among you. If I do any good, give me your support. If I go wrong, set me right”¹.

A few days ago, ahead of the inauguration of President Ashraf Ghani, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was writing in the *Washington Post* that the inauguration of Ghani is going to mark “the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan’s history and the first peaceful leadership transition in more than 40 years”. Ghani, Kerry also said, would “work in tandem with the country’s first-ever chief executive officer”, Abdullah Abdullah, after the “two statesmen ... came together to form a government of national unity following a very contentious election”².

Major challenges Ghani will be confronted with

According to local sources in Afghanistan, *one of the most important challenges is going to be confronted with is the difficult economic situation*. On September 23, for example, Samehullah Samem, a member of Afghan parliament from the western province of Farah noted that the Afghan economy is faltering, and strongly emphasized that

¹ “Ashraf Ghani sworn in as Afghan president”, *Al Jazeera*, September 29, 2014, text available at the Internet address <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/afghanistan-inaugurate-new-president-ghani-201492915136473986.html>

² Martin PENGELLY, “John Kerry praises Abdullah and Ghani as Afghanistan’s struggles continue”, September 27, 2014, in *The Guardian*, at the Internet address <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/27/john-kerry-afghanistan-abdullah-ghani-power-money>

Afghans “are completely dependent on the international community. We need the support of the international community, especially the United States of America”³.

Another important challenge for the decision makers in Kabul is the *very fragile security situation in the country*. A few minutes before Ashraf Ghani was sworn in as the country’s new president “a suicide bomber attacked a security checkpoint near the airport in Afghanistan’s capital”, Australian media reports. The same open source reports that “witness said they saw dead bodies, but it was not clear how many people have been killed or wounded”, and that the attack took place in spite of the fact that “security around the [Afghan] capital was heightened ahead of the ceremony over fears Taliban insurgents would try to disrupt the inauguration to attack international dignitaries”⁴.

Romania’s role in Afghanistan

Romania contributed a lot, together with other NATO (and non-NATO countries), to the international effort aimed at pacifying and stabilizing Afghanistan. *Romanian military forces started to operate in Afghanistan in mid-January 2002* (the Romanian Parliament had had approved this involvement on December 21, 2001)⁵. Starting with July 2002, the Romanian military presence in Afghanistan grew larger (an infantry battalion, plus a special detachment deployed in order to train Afghan forces, plus military police, plus staff elements)⁶. *At the peak of their mission in Afghanistan, the Romanian Armed Forces deployed there almost 2,000 personnel*.

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) offered its Afghan counterpart significant institutional help, including programs organized in Bucharest for training young Afghan diplomats. The most recent program of this sort has been organized by the

³ Rahim FAIEZ and Jason STRAZIUSO (*Associated Press*), “Afghanistan's Karzai Takes One Last Swipe at US”, *ABC News*, September 23, 2014, text available at the Internet address <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/afghanistans-karzai-takes-swipe-us-25692510>

⁴ “Suicide blast rocks Kabul minutes before new Afghan president sworn in”, *ABC News Australia*, September 29, 2014, at the Internet address <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-29/afghanistan-new-president-ashraf-ghani-sworn-in/5776962>

⁵ Visarion NEAGOE, *Afganistan: zece ani de război contra terorii*, Ed, Militară, București, 2011, p. 178

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 183

*Romanian Diplomatic Institute (IDR), the Romanian MFA and UNDP in May-June 2014*⁷.

On September 22, 2014, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made public a statement warmly saluting the new national unity government in Afghanistan, and also reiterating Romania's decision to offer Afghanistan significant supplementary assistance and help "along the next decade"⁸.

⁷ "Program de formare profesională dedicat unui grup de tineri diplomați din Republica Islamică Afganistan", on the official webpage of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute, at the Internet address <http://www.idr.ro/Iunie2014-4.html>, and "Finalizarea programului de formare profesională destinat tinerilor diplomați din Republica Islamică Afganistan", at the Internet address <http://www.idr.ro/13Iunie2014.html>

⁸ "MAE salută formarea Guvernului de uniune națională în Republica Islamică Afganistan", September 22, 2014, on the official webpage of the *Romanian MFA*, at the Internet address <http://mae.ro/node/28879>