



By: TA | AP Insight

# How much does the EU risk in its first talks with the Afghan Taliban on deportations?



A delegation from the Afghan Taliban met Tuesday with European Union staff in Brussels for closed-door talks that focused on diplomatic services and the “dignified returns” of Afghans to the isolated and war-ravaged nation, a Taliban official said.

Afghans make up one of the largest groups of migrants seeking asylum in the EU, but a growing number of governments in the 27-nation bloc want to **speed up and increase deportations** for those whose claims are rejected or who commit crimes in their host countries.

Abdul Qahar Balkhi, a spokesperson for the Taliban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called the visit “historic,” noting it was the first time a delegation from the Islamic Emirate held talks with the EU and EU nations in Brussels.

Balkhi, who led the delegation of five, said talks focused on “trust-building measures,” the Taliban's diplomatic presence in the EU and a “dignified return process.”

The meeting was held in an undisclosed location in the Belgian capital, where both the EU and NATO are headquartered.

The Commission said it co-chaired the meeting with Sweden and that representatives from 15 of the EU's 27 nations participated in discussions focused on easing deportations of criminals and security threats.

## Meeting could endanger Afghans in and out of Europe

Afghan authorities have imposed draconian restrictions on rights, particularly for women and girls, since the Taliban **seized power** in the country in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led forces.

Rights groups said Tuesday's meeting undercuts the EU's human rights obligations and could endanger people in Europe and Afghanistan.

“Any engagement with the Taliban needs to prioritize protecting human rights and accountability – not deporting people to danger there,” said Fereshta Abbasi, a researcher at Human Rights Watch. “EU countries are undermining their credibility by condemning Taliban abuses and pursuing accountability on one hand, while cooperating with the Taliban to forcibly return Afghans on the other.”

With not a single EU nation recognizing the Taliban, the meeting in Brussels symbolizes a small crack in the group's diplomatic isolation since seizing power five years ago.

Most nations around the world – including the entire EU – **cut off diplomatic relations** at the time.

The Taliban has been quietly expanding its access to diplomatic missions in Europe ever since.

**Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai said that she was deeply shaken that the EU was talking with the Taliban**

Afghan activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai said Monday that she was “deeply shaken” that the EU was talking with the Taliban.

“Europe must not legitimise a regime responsible for one of the worst human rights crises in the world. Any engagement with the Taliban must begin and end with the rights of Afghan women and girls,” she wrote on X.

Members of the Taliban delegation were issued visas after security screening with limited territorial validity, giving them 24 hours in Belgium and no access to other countries in the Schengen border-free travel zone.

Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot said Belgium complied with EU requests to grant the Taliban delegates visas.

“Making a meeting possible in the framework of our host-state policy does not amount to recognition, does not amount to legitimacy, and does not constitute an invitation by the Belgian government,” Prévot said in a statement.

Since neither Belgium nor the EU officially recognizes the Taliban government, the meeting did not take place at official sites belonging to either.

## The drive to increase deportations from EU grows stronger

A spokesperson for the European Commission said the meeting was a response to pressure from a clear majority of the 27 EU member states — 20 of whom signed a letter in October calling for stronger migration policies, including a ramp-up of deportations.

Spokesperson Markus Lammert said the Commission had been asked to coordinate “technical talks” on returns.



Across the EU, only 2% of the 22,870 Afghans told to return had done so - Anneleen Van Bossuyt

“This does not mean recognition,” he said.

While it was the first meeting of the Taliban in the EU, the first meeting between the two sides was held in Afghanistan in January when the Commission sent a mission to Kabul. It also maintains staff there.

The October letter was drafted in part by Belgian Migration Minister Anneleen Van Bossuyt, who said then that “we can no longer afford a standstill. It is high time for a firm and joint approach, so that Europe can regain control over migration and security.”

Bossuyt said that across the EU, only 2% of the 22,870 Afghans told to return had done so.

## Afghanistan faces an increasingly dire situation

Afghanistan has been dealing with the return of about **3 million Afghans** from Pakistan and Iran in the past year alone, all of whom have pretty much been forcibly repatriated from those two countries.

That has exacerbated a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan, which is already reeling from food and economic crises, including biting sanctions.

### The EU has recently passed deep reforms to its collective rules aiming to ramp up deportations

Afghan Taliban authorities have imposed **draconian restrictions** on women and girls, including bans on education beyond primary school and on working in all but very few professions, as well as strict regulations on what women are allowed to wear in public.

“The desperate scenes of people — including EU staff — fleeing Afghanistan are a recent memory. It is unconscionable that the EU would now try and deport people to Afghanistan, which has only become **more dangerous** in the meantime,” said Eve Geddie, Director of Amnesty International’s European Institutions Office.

Facing political pressure to toughen migration policies across the 27-nation bloc, the EU has recently passed deep reforms to its collective rules aiming to ramp up deportations — including allowing the setting up of so-called

“return hubs,” increased domestic surveillance capabilities, tighter border controls, and engagement with the Taliban government.

With Afghanistan facing food shortages and economic collapse, the Taliban government is in need of humanitarian aid and hopes to lessen its international economic and political isolation.