

E.U. Plans \$1.15 Billion in Aid to Stabilize Afghanistan Region

“We need to do it fast,” a European leader declared, announcing an aid package for Afghanistan and its neighbors.



By Steven Erlanger

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As the Group of 20 held a virtual summit on Afghanistan, the European Union announced Tuesday that it would provide one billion euros in aid — about \$1.15 billion — for Afghanistan and neighboring countries helping Afghans fleeing the new Taliban government.

“We must do all we can to avert a major humanitarian and socioeconomic collapse in Afghanistan,” Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, said in a statement. “We need to do it fast.”

In power less than two months, the Taliban have already alarmed many world leaders with measures reminiscent of their notoriously repressive regime 20 years ago. But Ms. von der Leyen said the aid was badly needed.

“The Afghan people should not pay the price of the Taliban’s actions,” she said.

Ms. von der Leyen emphasized that the European Union did not recognize the Taliban as a government. And she said it would not stop pressuring the group to respect human rights — particularly those of women — and to allow Afghans with proper documents who wish to leave the country to do so.

But she warned of a looming humanitarian disaster tied to a variety of factors, including the internal chaos in Afghanistan and a drought. Most international assistance to the country, including E.U. development aid, has been cut off since the Afghan government collapsed and the Taliban took power in August.

The one billion euros in aid announced Tuesday includes €300 million for humanitarian aid already announced and a further €250 million for extra support to those “in urgent need, notably in the field of health,” Ms. von der Leyen said. The money will go to international organizations already working in Afghanistan.

She did not give details about the aid to neighboring countries, but it is in part intended to encourage people fleeing Afghanistan to remain in the region and stem a new flow of migrants and asylum seekers to Europe.

“Afghanistan’s direct neighbors have been the first to provide safety to the Afghans who have fled the country,” Ms. von der Leyen said. “This is why additional funds will be allocated to support these countries in migration management, as well as in cooperation on terrorism prevention, fight against organized crime and migrant smuggling.”

On Tuesday, U.S. and European officials met with Taliban representatives in Doha, Qatar. The European Union said that the meeting was “an informal exchange at a technical level,” and that it did not represent a recognition of the interim Taliban government.

The Doha meeting was intended, said an E.U. spokeswoman, Nabila Massrali, “to address issues such as the need for an inclusive government in Afghanistan, the free passage for Afghans who wish to leave Afghanistan, humanitarian access, respect and promotion of human rights, including the rights of women and minorities, and the need to prevent terrorist and violent extremist movements from using the Afghan soil to threaten other countries.”

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