

UPF Vienna, Austria's roundtable on Economic Opportunities in Afghanistan

Peter Haider
June 25, 2019



Vienna, Austria -- UPF co-sponsored a roundtable discussion titled "Economic Potentials and Opportunities in Afghanistan."

The Austria-Afghanistan Society, in cooperation with UPF-Austria and the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation, organized the roundtable, which was attended by 70 guests. The event was held on June 25, 2019, in the UPF Peace Embassy.

In times of protracted crises, armed conflicts, deteriorating security and peace talks in Afghanistan, this panel discussion focused on an underestimated but very important topic: the economic crisis in Afghanistan that has severe implications for the population and is directly related to human security. In this context, the panelists did not focus only on the big economic picture but in particular on potentials and opportunities for the population, exploring bottom-up approaches, alternative livelihoods, remittances and how to make a living with small businesses.

After words of welcome by Peter Haider, president of UPF-Austria, Dr. Friedrich Schwank, president of the Austria-Afghanistan Society, introduced the topic. The panel included Razik Azad, who spoke about "The Socio-Economic Situation in Afghanistan"; Baktash Jami, who passionately introduced to the audience "Economic Potentials and Opportunities in Afghanistan"; and Petra Oberberger, who presented her research about "The Relevance of Remittances for Afghans."

The economy of Afghanistan has had a significant improvement in the last decade due to the infusion of billions of dollars in international assistance and remittances from Afghan expatriates. The assistance that

came from expatriates and outside investors saw this increase when there was more political reliability after the fall of the Taliban regime. The nation's GDP stands at about \$70 billion with an exchange rate of \$20 billion (2017), and the GDP per capita is about \$2,000. It imports over \$6 billion worth of goods but exports nearly \$1 billion only, mainly fruits and nuts. Despite holding over \$1 trillion in proven untapped mineral deposits, Afghanistan remains one of the least developed countries on the planet. About 25 percent of its population is unemployed and lives below the poverty line. Many of the unemployed men join the foreign-funded militant groups or the world of crime, particularly as smugglers. The Afghan government has long been pleading for foreign investment in order to improve Afghanistan's economy.

Dr. Markus Gauster, a board member of the Austria-Afghanistan Society and the main organizer of the event, moderated the discussion and spoke about projects his society is organizing and planning in Afghanistan.

