Production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan

2007/2125(INI) - 12/09/2007

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Mr Marco **CAPPATO** (ALDE, IT) with a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan.

The report recalls that, according to the United Nations, Afghanistan produced 6,100 tonnes of opium in 2006, in other words, 50% more than in 2004. It also states that almost 40% of Afghanistan's GDP is opium-related, and that 3 million people are engaged in the poppy sector producing an income of 1,965 US dollars a year per family.

The report goes on to say that, in 2007, the farm-gate value of the opium harvest totalled 1 billion US dollars, or 13% of the licit GDP of Afghanistan. The total potential value of the country's 2007 opium harvest accruing to farmers, laboratory owners and Afghan traffickers is expected to have reached 3.1 billion US dollars, which represents almost half the country's licit GDP of 7.5 billion US dollars, or 32% of the overall economy, including the opium sector,

The European Union remains the biggest donor as regards efforts aimed at reducing the opium supply through projects that promote alternative livelihoods as a substitute for illicit crops. In parallel, Afghanistan has also introduced strategies to combat drugs and to replace opium production. The Afghan Government has also established a Drug Regulation Committee, which comprises officials from the Ministries of Counter Narcotics, Health and Finance, in order to ‘regulate the licensing, sale, dispensation, import and export of all drugs for licit purposes in the country’.

In this regard, the report calls on the EU to do more to bring about a drastic reduction in opium production since Afghanistan has practically become the exclusive supplier of the world’s deadliest drug and that it has become the main source of income of local warlords, the Taliban and terrorist groups.

There is, however, a small glimmer of hope since the number of provinces that no longer cultivate opium has more than doubled (going from 6 in 2006 to 13 in 2007), and half of Afghanistan’s illicit opium cultivation in the province of Helmand. The report considers that the fight against drug production in Afghanistan should reflect a differentiated approach by locality and be targeted on poorer regions with limited resources, which are the most dependent on opium in the first place.

A further issue was raised by the Senlis Council (an international think tank dealing with security and development issues) in 2007 and presented in a detailed technical dossier describing how poppies can be produced for medical purposes. However, according to the International Narcotics Control Board, supply is currently greater than demand and there is a global surplus of opiates for medical purposes.

For this reason, the Committee recommends that the Council:

(a) opposes, in the framework of integrated development programmes, recourse to fumigation as a means of eradicating the poppy in Afghanistan;

(b) elaborates and submits to the Afghan Government, within the framework of European sponsored illicit supply reduction programmes, a comprehensive plan and strategy aimed at controlling drug production in Afghanistan, by improving governance and tackling corruption at the highest levels of the Afghan

administration (with a special focus on the Ministry of the Interior); targeting action against the key traffickers on the ground; improving comprehensive rural development, particularly in the poorest areas and in those not yet producing opium on a large scale; carefully and selectively engaging in manual eradication; and looking at the possibility of pilot projects for small-scale conversion of parts of the current illicit poppy cultivation into fields for the production of legal opium-based analgesics;

(c) offers its assistance in the implementation of a scientific "Poppy for Medicine" pilot project that will further investigate how licensing can contribute to the alleviation of poverty, diversification of the rural economy, general development and increased security, and how it can become a successful part of multilateral efforts for Afghanistan.