New strategy for Afghanistan

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Pino ARLACCHI (S&D, IT) on a new strategy for Afghanistan.

Members believe that the EU strategy for Afghanistan should have to take as its starting point **two premise** s:

1. an acknowledgement of the continuing deterioration in security and socio-economic indicators in Afghanistan despite almost a decade of international involvement and investment; and
2. the need to further encourage the shift in the mindset of the international community so that in future its plans and decisions are shaped in close cooperation with the Afghans.

Members stress that any long-term solution to the Afghan crisis has to start from the resolution of the problems relating to internal security, civil protection and economic and social development. In this context, concrete measures need to be taken for the eradication of poverty, under-development and discrimination against women, for enhancing respect for human rights and the rule of law, strengthening reconciliation mechanisms, ensuring an end to opium production, engaging in a robust state-building exercise, as well as banishing Al-Quaeda from the country.

They reiterate that the EU and its Member States should support Afghanistan in the reconstruction of its own state, with stronger democratic institutions capable of ensuring national sovereignty, security based on a democratically accountable army and police, a competent and independent judiciary, state unity, territorial integrity, equality between men and women, media freedom, an emphasis on education and health, sustainable economic development and the prosperity of the people of Afghanistan, and respect for the historical, religious, spiritual and cultural traditions and rights of all communities on Afghan territory.

To create a dynamic in Afghanistan, members support the idea of a **special long-term flagship programme** focusing on priorities identified by the Afghans themselves.

Members stress the need to ensure a **sustainable improvement in women's lives** by ensuring they can enjoy full fundamental, political, civil and social rights, protection against the fundamentalists and any other discriminatory practices. There is also a need to increase the level of funding and political and technical support for policies to improve the situation of Afghan women.

On the political level, Members note that the **parliamentary elections on 18 September 2010** were marred by fraud and violence and that many Afghans have been prevented from exercising their fundamental right to vote. They also deplore the irregularities in the country's judicial processes and the continued existence of the death penalty.

The report also stresses the need for fundamental reforms in the country. These should focus on the following four main areas: i) international aid and coordination; ii) the implications of the peace process; iii) the impact of police training; and iv) the elimination of opium cultivation through alternative development.

The committee's proposal on these areas are as follows:

1) International aid – use and abuse: Members recall that the combined EU (European Community and Member States) budget for aid to Afghanistan for the period 2002-2010 totalled around EUR 8 billion.

However, despite the huge injections of foreign aid, the situation in Afghanistan continues to be discouraging and, since 2004, the number of people living below the poverty threshold has increased by 130%. Measures such as the following need to be taken:

- strengthening of the transparency and accountability of financial assistance granted to the Afghan government, to local and international NGOs;
- humanitarian aid to be distributed on a geographically more homogenous basis, in the light of an analysis of needs and in keeping with the requirement for urgency;
- combating of corruption since it is an obstacle in terms of access to basic public services, such as health and education, and represents a huge impediment to the country's socio-economic development (only USD 6 billion (or 15%) out of a total of USD 40 billion in aid actually reached the Afghan Government between 2002 and 2009, and that, of the remaining USD 34 billion, which was channelled through international organisations, regional development banks, NGOs, international contractors, etc., between 70% and 80% never reached the intended beneficiaries);
- strengthening of the coordination between donor countries and provide for detailed evaluations of European and international aid;
- setting up a centralised database on, and to analyse the costs and impact of, all EU aid to Afghanistan;
- pruning drastically the operating expenses of humanitarian and development bodies active in Afghanistan whereby the EU in allocating funds to concrete projects implemented in real and balanced partnership with Afghan institutions;
- improving the coordination of reconstruction and development efforts at regional level in order to promote cross-border development;
- carrying out of an evaluation of the relative impact of EU measures on the overall situation in the country and of the level of coordination and cooperation between EU bodies and other international missions and measures.

Overall, Members call for **aid to Afghanistan to be dispatched directly to the population in Afghanistan immediately affected**. In this regard, impartial humanitarian bodies should be responsible for the distribution of aid in the country and military personnel should be involved only in entirely exceptional circumstances. They stress that the deployment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in reconstruction and/or development-aid activities is inappropriate since the distinction between civilian development-aid workers and the military is thereby blurred. They also note that the decision to place the **US military supply chain in private hands** and are appalled that protection money and extortion at every level of the military supply chain constitute the most significant source of funding for the insurgency. They are equally appalled by the fact that the full traceability of EU financial contributions might not be fully guaranteed in all cases.

2) The peace process: recalling the absolute necessity for good governance in Afghanistan, Members calls for fundamental judicial reform in the country. They consider that that much of the blame for the present stalemate in Afghanistan rests with **early miscalculations** made prior to the new counter-insurgency strategy **by coalition forces** who foresaw a speedy military victory over the Taliban and an easy transition to a stable country run by a legitimate government with strong Western backing. They believe that the **presence of the Taliban was underestimated** and the ability of the Karzai government to provide governance overestimated, and that, as a result, little attention was paid to the task of rebuilding and developing the country. In this context, they call for new measures to be taken which may be summarised as follows:

- promote a transition using an approach that is more civil and less military;
- favour a **political approach involving negotiations with the Taliban** and other combatant groups, as well as other political players in the country who are ready to participate in a government of national unity capable of putting an end to the war;

- banish from the country Al-Qaeda and its promotion of international terrorism, as well as any other terrorist group;
- action to eliminate poppy cultivation.

Members also note the complexity of the conflict and the **key role played by Pakistan** in this regard. They condemn in the strongest terms the involvement of the Pakistan Intelligence Service (ISI) with the insurgency, its intention being to make sure that Pakistan, too, gets a satisfactory outcome from any peace dividend. They stress, however, that for peace to be allowed to take root in Afghanistan political deals among key regional powers, including India, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian States, Russia, China and Turkey will be required, and a common position of non-interference and support for an independent Afghanistan. They also calls for normalisation of the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, namely through a final settlement on the issue of the international border between the two countries.

In parallel, Members call for a much more active EU role in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. Working with the Member States and the United States, this should channel more of the international aid effort through domestic authorities and the Kabul government. It should also encourage the US to move away from its policy of circumventing domestic institutions in the delivery of international aid and the use of US Special Forces and local militias, such approaches being of questionable legal status.

3) Police and the rule of law: Members stress that Afghanistan must be provided with an efficient police force and an autonomous army capable of ensuring security so as to permit a subsequent withdrawal of the foreign military presence from the country. They recognise, however, that having self-sustaining security forces is a somewhat long-term goal. There is a particular need for a more coordinated and integrated approach in the training of police, as well as, separately, the training of army officers, and for closer coordination of their work in order to avoid unnecessary duplication. Several measures are proposed:

- a comprehensive reform of the Interior Ministry;
- strengthening of the mandate of EUPOL;
- more coherent and sustainable training of the police by focussing in particular on literacy programmes for recruits;
- an immediate end to police training by private contractors;
- the introduction of a large-scale police training programme launched by EUPOL and NATO/ISAF;
- increase significantly the number of police trainers on the ground so that the objective of the London Conference to reach 134 000 trained Afghan police officers by the end of 2011 becomes a realistic scenario, and, in this context, merge Member States' bilateral police training missions with that of EUPOL;
- give **preference to recruits** with a basic standard of literacy **who are not drug users** and are better qualified psychologically and physically than the present cohort.

Members stress that police training cannot deliver without a properly functioning judiciary. It is, therefore, necessary to provide increased financial and technical support to strengthen the judicial system, including an increase in the salary of judges at all levels and the putting in place, in coordination with the UN, of a **specialised mission to train judges,** as well as public officials in the Afghan Ministry of Justice and the penal system.

4) Narcotics: Members point out that Afghanistan is the source of 90% of the world's illicit opium, and yet that when coalition forces entered Kabul, in 2001, no opium poppies were being grown in Afghanistan owing to the UN's success in achieving a ban on their cultivation. As a result of the impunity given to growers and traffickers, within two years, cultivation reached pre-2001 levels. According to Members, a large, well-resourced military force should, subsequently, have found it easy to sustain this opium-free

situation through local agricultural development projects, protected by its troops against the Taliban and local warlords. They note, however, that opium production is still a key social, economic and security issue, and calls on the EU to consider this as a **strategic priority** in its policies towards Afghanistan.

Members also point out that more than 90% of heroin in Europe originates from Afghanistan and that the cost to public health in European countries runs into billions of dollars. They emphasise that the challenges posed by the drug economy in Afghanistan must be tackled not only nationally but internationally by addressing all links in the drug chain and that this requires, in particular:

- assistance to farmers to reduce supply;
- drug prevention and treatment to curb demand;
- law enforcement against the intermediaries;
- massive investment in the establishment of a comprehensive agricultural and rural policy to offer opium producers a credible, lasting alternative;
- targeted measures to reduce the number of drug addicts in Afghanistan itself.

Members point out that, in 2009 trade in narcotics totalled USD 3.4 billion and the potential gross export value of opium was 26% of Afghanistan's GDP. They indicate that the Taliban net only 4% of the profits from the annual narcotics trade, and local farmers 21%, with 75% going to government officials, the police, local and regional brokers, and traffickers. It notes, in short, that **NATO's Afghan allies are in fact getting the lion's share of the profits from the drugs trade**.

Members recall that, between 2001 and 2009, the US and the international community spent USD 1.61 billion on counter-narcotics measures without having any significant impact on production and trafficking. They point out that, unless the dependence of the Afghan economy on drugs is ended once and for all and a viable alternative economic growth model found, the goals of restoring security and stability to the region will not be achieved. They call for other sources of viable revenue to be made available to the 3.4 million Afghans who make their living from opium poppy cultivation, such as saffron or pomegranates, which deliver a much higher income than opium poppies. They consider that, as in Pakistan, Laos and Thailand, a similar process ofphasing out opium poppy cultivation could be envisaged for Afghanistan at a cost of EUR 100 million per year by specifically earmarking 10% of the EU's annual aid to the country for a period of five years. They call for a **five-year national plan for the elimination of illicit opium crops**, promoted through cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation, the latter being the major victim of Afghan heroin.

To conclude, Members call on the Council and the Commission to incorporate this proposed strategy fully into their existing strategies and to take the proposal fully into account within their own national plans and to take full account of all the budgetary implications of the proposals contained in this report.