New strategy for Afghanistan

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on a new strategy for Afghanistan.

It believes that the EU strategy for Afghanistan should have to take as its starting point **two premises**:

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.

Parliament stresses 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. Members are aware of the set of factors hampering progress in Afghanistan but has chosen to focus on four main areas where, it believes, efforts expended could result in improvements: international aid and coordination; the implications of the peace process; the impact of police training; and the elimination of opium cultivation through alternative development. Parliament reiterates 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, Parliament supports the idea of a **special long-term flagship programme** focusing on priorities identified by the Afghans themselves. It stresses 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**, the resolution notes 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. Parliament also deplores the irregularities in the country's judicial processes and the continued existence of the death penalty.

As regards the four main areas, Parliament outlines the following:

1) International aid – use and abuse: the resolution recalls 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%.

It acknowledges the widespread perception that Afghan Government corruption is solely responsible for the lack of provision of essential services to citizens, but also notes that the majority of resources for socio-economic development have been channelled through international organisations (regional development

banks, NGOs, etc). Parliament condemns the fact that a significant proportion of European and other international aid money is lost along the distribution chain and draws attention to the four main ways in which this happens: waste, excessive intermediary and security costs, overbilling and corruption.

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). Parliament notes the decision taken at the Kabul Conference that 50% of the international aid should be channelled through the Afghan national budget by 2012, in accordance with Afghanistan's request;
- 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.

Overall, Parliament calls 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.

Contrary to the committee responsible's opinion, Plenary reject the idea that the deployment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in reconstruction and/or development-aid activities is inappropriate.

Parliament draws attention to the huge cost of the war prosecuted in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2009, estimated at over USD 300 billion and equivalent to more than 20 times Afghanistan's GDP. It also notes that the decision to place the US military supply chain in private hands without any reliable criteria for assuring accountability, transparency and legality is fuelling extortion and corruption, as warlords, local mafia bosses and ultimately Taliban commanders end up taking a significant share of the USD 2.2-3 billion business of military logistics in Afghanistan.

2) The peace process: recalling the absolute necessity for good governance in Afghanistan, Parliament calls for fundamental judicial reform in the country. It considers 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. It believes 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.

Parliament notes the complexity of the conflict and the key role Pakistan plays in this context. Plenary also notes the involvement of the Pakistan Intelligence Service (ISI) aimed at making sure that Pakistan, too, gets a satisfactory outcome from any peace dividend. Parliament stresses, 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. It 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. In an oral amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament urges the EU and its Member States to work together with the United States to channel more of the international aid effort through domestic authorities and the Kabul Government, and to ensure that drones, special forces and local militias against Taliban leaders are used according to General Petraeus' orders for zero tolerance on the loss of innocent civilians' lives.

Plenary pays tribute to the servicemen and women of all the Allied Forces who have lost their lives in defending freedom, and expresses its condolences to their families, as well as to the families of all innocent Afghan victims.

Members recall that the US has stated that it will start to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in summer 2011, other countries have either already withdrawn or are making plans to do so, and others still have not indicated an intention to withdraw; whereas, however, the withdrawal of the military has to be a gradual and coordinated process in the framework of a political project that guarantees a smooth transition of responsibility to the Afghan security forces.

3) Police and the rule of law: Parliament stresses 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. It recognises, 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.

The resolution stresses 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: Parliament points 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. Members 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.

They 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**.

Parliament recalls 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. It points 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. It calls 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. Members 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.

The resolution highlights that some poppy eradication in Afghanistan has been carried out using chemical herbicides, and this practice results in serious harm to people and to the environment in terms of soil and water pollution. However, there is now a consensus on the need to concentrate repressive measures on the drug trade and heroin-producing labs, and not on farmers.

To conclude, Parliament calls 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 resolution.