

What the EU has done and what it should do

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What is the EU doing in Afghanistan? Nothing, according to some US cables revealed by Wikileaks. “2010 is the last chance we give to Afghanistan. No one believes in it any more”, said Mr Herman Van Rompuy over a coffee with an US ambassador in Brussels. Without any doubt this is a remarkable kick to diplomacy and politically correct. Either way Mr Van Rompuy expressed in few words what Europeans have been wondering about for months: what is the EU doing in Afghanistan? And some could even wonder why the EU accepted to go over there.

This question must be asked after the MEPs’ vote on Mr Arlacchi’s Report on Afghanistan hold in Strasbourg. The Chamber has backed with a great majority the report proposal to rethink the whole strategy in Afghanistan. As Mr Van Rompuy highlighted, the whole ‘pacific’ mission has not led to the expected success. After billions of Euros spent and hundreds of lives lost, the pacification of the country is still far to be gained. MEPs agreed on acknowledging that the military intervention in Afghanistan has failed and security is completely at stake. Currently some 150,000 soldiers are in the country, and almost 32,000 come from European Member States who agreed to contribute to the mission after the 9/11 terrorist attack to the twin towers in New York. Today, after 9 years the authors of the attack are still unknown and the security in Afghanistan is precarious.

Mr Arlacchi’s Report, welcomed by a show of hands by MEPs, blames the intervention and calls for a prompt exit strategy in cooperation with the Afghan authorities. To make it short, the US strategy carried out so far has received a sound red light from the EP which rejected a further involvement in such a mission. Civil casualties and the wide disruption of the country caused the deterioration of the EU relationship with the region and a loss of credibility in doing peace missions. According to some Wikileaks cables, Mr Van Rumpuy must share this point of view. The documents draw indeed the attention on his scepticism about prolonging the mission. Unfortunately, diplomacy forbids politics to sincerely speak .

Talking about sincerity, there are also questions about the EU public money spent in Afghanistan. Mr Arlacchi's Report denounces the misspending of the international aid funds allocated also by the EU and administrated by non profit organisations. According to the Report, only 20% of such funds really go to whom they are expected to go. The main part of the money gets lost into corruption, over-billing and waste. That is the reason why Mr Arlacchi, who had worked previously in Afghanistan with the UN, suggests to get the Afghan authorities more involved into fund management so as to avoid excessive intermediaries and security cost. It is a matter of fact that the so called 'war lords' have largely taken advantage of such a situation spilling money from the international aid funds.

What else? The Report reveals that the opium cultivation is not affected by the alley intervention and Afghans still count on it to make money to survive. Measures to promote alternative cultivation are more than needed to tackle effectively the issue of drug's economy throughout the region. Even here, the EU strategy has not been effective so far, leaving scope to drug dealers and human exploitation.

Unfortunately, the reported back by the European Parliament has no legislative power as it is an initiative. Either way, it shows the path to follow to get out by a gloomy situation in which the EU has dragged itself. Hopes go now to Mr Van Rompuy, for him to be able to put into force his statements released by Wikileaks and saving the EU from an embarrassing situation. Only by converting words into acts the EU can set right a military intervention that has never been put in place.