

A Look Behind The News, by Ferdinando Riccardi

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Arlacchi Report marking a turning point? The European Parliament is flexing its muscles in the field of foreign relations, not only the explicit powers conferred by the Lisbon Treaty (see issues 10170 and 10173), but also through new instruments at its disposal. It has made use of its budgetary powers to influence the operations of the EU's new diplomatic corps. Its new powers in trade and farming matters enable it to intervene in two crucial foreign policy areas and the Pino Arlacchi Report on renewal of the EU's strategy to Afghanistan may be a new turning point.

The Arlacchi Report is still a draft report at the moment, requiring approval by the EP foreign relations committee (scheduled for September) and debate at the November plenary. Pino Arlacchi, an Italian member of the ALDE Group, has already submitted his draft report to a press conference after an initial debate at the foreign affairs committee where strong backing was given to his ideas (see previous newsletter). The report argues that the EP should go well beyond simply stating an opinion (which would only accumulate dust along with all the other EP never-followed-up-resolutions) and be much more ambitious. After the two hours of positive debate at the committee meeting, he says that the views expressed in his report should be incorporated into the operational guidelines for the Council and Commission on EU funding in Afghanistan. In his opinion, it is a whole new strategy for Afghanistan that needs to be implemented. One should remember that until 2002, Pino Arlacchi was the managing director of the UN drugs-control programme and therefore has direct experience of foreign policy matters.

Waste and corruption. Arlacchi says that his report, six months in the making, is a political document criticising the vast levels of corruption and enormous waste. He estimates that in Afghanistan, 80% of international non-military aid never arrives at its planned destination. In our newsletter, we have given a number of examples of the type of abuse he is denouncing, how subcontractors and sometimes the initial Afghan recipients are profiting from the vast sums of money flowing around. Private companies (mostly from the US) control and distribute millions upon millions of dollars as they see fit, taking a ridiculously high cut for themselves. Some international aid gets through to the Taliban and other warlords, who therefore have a financial interest in seeing the war continue as long as possible.

Some EU funding is used properly but there is enormous wastage all the same because the costs are inflated to astronomic levels and it is the European taxpayer who is funding all this.

New EU strategy. The key areas of the new EU strategy recommended in the Arlacchi Report are bringing the war to an end and gradually ending farming of the opium poppy. Arlacchi takes a radical line on the first issue, saying that everyone knows that there are no military solutions and continuing with the war will lead the world precisely nowhere. The people gaining the most from the current situation are the warlords, a rabble of criminals and malefactors, and a handful

of private companies that have a sinister reputation. On the European side, efforts to train the Afghan police should be turned into an EU training mission. Peace negotiations should logically be conducted by the Afghan government, requiring a government of national unity to be set up.

On opium, Arlacchi argues that the five-year opium eradication programme is wholly realistic in terms of both cost and results (see above-mentioned previous issue of this newsletter).

It is not the details of the plan I would like to highlight so much as the fact that the aim is to set up a whole new EU strategy backed by all the EU institutions, in other words a genuine EU foreign policy strategy. Meanwhile, an international conference has taken place in Kabul that has been widely reported upon in the media and that seems to contradict the Arlacchi Report, which has greater military and anti-opium ambitions.

Africa next, after Afghanistan? Arlacchi's ambitions do not stop with Afghanistan. At the end of the press conference, he said that all funding for countries at war should be properly justified and necessary from a humanitarian viewpoint and should be managed differently. He said that some countries in Africa are given aid and the situation just gets worse. This seems to suggest that one should take the demands and views expressed by certain bodies with a pinch of salt, bodies whose main activity is demanding the perpetual mushrooming of aid for poor countries. It would appear prudent and reasonable to make better controls of the impact and consequences of the EU's funding.