

*Wednesday, 15 December 2010 - Strasbourg*

*Debate:*

*Pino Arlacchi, rapporteur* – Madam President, the report that we considered today has been approved virtually unanimously by the Committee on Foreign Affairs of this Parliament. It is the result of one year's work by a team which I led and is based on extensive consultations in Kabul and Brussels.

This report is an attempt to explain a paradox: why has so little been achieved in Afghanistan, in spite of nine years of international involvement? Since 2001, military operations inside that country have cost more than EUR 300 billion and several thousand human lives, and at least another EUR 40 billion have been spent on the civilian side: in total, more than 30 times the current Afghan GDP.

In spite of this huge effort, Afghanistan is still the number one producer of narcotic drugs. It is still one of the poorest countries in the world, where – for the majority of the Afghan population – life is short, brutal and nasty, as it was in our continent five centuries ago. There are more victims of maternal mortality alone in Afghanistan than the war: over 20 000 a year as against 2 300. The answer to this paradox is not simple. The opium problem and the strength of the insurgency must be taken into account, along with the belief in the illusion of a quick military victory, which dominated the early years of the international presence. Moreover, the legitimacy of the central government has been overestimated, as has the efficiency of international aid in the reconstruction of the country.

This report does not try to simplify all these matters. It accepts the challenge in its full dimension, and this document is an attempt to suggest new directions for our policies. The report approaches the subject from a European standpoint. This means that the Afghan crisis is considered from an angle that does not simply mirror the American perspective on it. European values and principles matter. They influence the way the Afghan problem is seen by European citizens, and they do not believe in a military solution in principle, because more than 65 years ago we abandoned the idea that war and occupation of foreign lands is good solution.

Today's EU is built on an aversion to war, and this report reflects this feeling. On the specific issue of Afghanistan, EU citizens strongly support a civilian approach as an alternative to the use of force. Our approach is not naive; it is not, as has been said, Venus's softness against Mars's strength. It is instead the power of reason, of human solidarity, applied to a crisis like the Afghan one that cannot be approached with a simplistic solution and mentality.

This report proposes a strategy that does not exclude the limited use of coercive means. The security of the people of Afghanistan from terrorists and criminal attacks is a prerequisite for development, and this Parliament believes that the combination of peace-keeping interventions, multilateral diplomacy, domestic peace negotiations, effective poverty reduction measures, the establishment of democratic institutions and the protection of women's rights are the pillars of a new, winning strategy in Afghanistan as elsewhere.

I hope that the strategy which is outlined here will be implemented carefully by the new system, and I take this opportunity to invite Baroness Ashton to join Parliament in this endeavour.

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