

Wednesday, 16 December 2009

*Debate:*

*Pino Arlacchi, on behalf of the ALDE Group* – Madam President, we are here to deal with the EU plan of action for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Committee on Foreign Affairs of this Parliament has given me the opportunity to be the rapporteur on a new strategy for Afghanistan.

We need a new strategy – or maybe we just need any strategy at all – on the civilian side because, until now, the EU intervention in that country has not had enough coherence and seems to have had a very limited impact. I am afraid, Mrs Ashton, that I cannot share your initial statement on Afghanistan because it is too generic, too bureaucratic, too unfocused – like the current action plan. I believe Parliament must contribute to making this strategy stronger and more coherent.

I am putting together all the necessary bits of information. First of all, I have to say that it is turning out to be very difficult to get even the most basic data on how much was spent by the EU in Afghanistan after the 2001 occupation, where the EU aid arrived and how much of it can be accounted for. We know that almost EUR 1 billion is spent every year there, which is a big sum. The Afghan GDP is just EUR 6.9 billion. Our civilian aid therefore amounts to more than 20 percent of the yearly Afghan GDP, a figure that has the potential to reverse the destiny of the country if properly used.

Secondly, my attempt to draw a new strategy for Afghanistan will start with an effort to identify what has been, and what should be, the EU interest in the area. I will focus part of my report on the elimination of the opium poppy through the alternative development strategy.

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