

Agence Europe, 17 December 2010

THE DAY IN POLITICS

Brussels, 16/12/2010 (Agence Europe) - A large majority of MEPs (507 for, 77 against and 4 abstentions) adopted the report by Pino Arlacchi (S&D, Italy) on a new EU strategy for Afghanistan, calling for reform of international aid, the elimination of the poppy crop, better coordination for the training of Afghan police forces and support of the peace process. The vote at the EP committee on foreign affairs in early November had taken the most controversial proposals out of the report, such as the description of western forces deployed in the country as occupation forces. Nonetheless, the report by the Socialist MEP still aroused considerable debate before the vote on Wednesday 15 December. A ban on the use of UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), considered by Arlacchi as contrary to the peace process and used to “decapitate” the Afghan insurgency, was among the proposals most fiercely challenged.

Presenting his report, Pino Arlacchi asked why, despite nine years of international intervention since 2001 - during which time military operations have cost over €300 billion and many human lives, and at least €40 billion have been spent on humanitarian aid - “Afghanistan remains the main drug producer in the world and one of the poorest countries”. Without giving an answer to this, he again underlined the fact that the report sought to provide a “civilian response” to the Afghan crisis without reproducing the “American perspective”. “Intervention for peace, multilateral diplomacy, measures for combating poverty, the creation of democratic institutions and the protection of human rights” must be the pillars for European action, he said. Paying tribute to Richard Holbrook who died on Monday, Catherine Ashton shed a more optimistic light on the situation, saying “our commitment in Afghanistan is a long-term commitment” and is due to the fact that it is necessary to prevent the country from becoming a haven for terrorists. Since 2001, progress has been made, the European Union high representative stressed. “Eight percent of the population has access to basic medical care compared to less than 2% in 2001” and 40,000 fewer babies die in Afghanistan due to improvements in prenatal care, she pointed out. The European Union should indeed continue to play a role in Afghanistan, Baroness Ashton said, although she believes it must continue to combat corruption and continue its work to ensure there is rule of law. The involvement of women at every level of civilian life is also an important element of European Union action, she stressed. Philippe Juvin (EPP, France), who served in Afghanistan as a military doctor, said he finds the text has a great defect in that it seeks to make the West responsible for everything that is making Afghanistan suffer. “I am fully aware of the complexity of the situation. I know how cruel war can be”, he said, but “this anti-militarism, this primary anti-Americanism, this self-flagellation of the western forces must end, I believe”. “The Taliban are the enemy - not the American forces, and not the western

forces”, he added, going on to say that banning drones would be tantamount to making forces deployed run even greater risks. “European contingents act in a way that should make us proud. They do not simply carry out military action but also reconstruction”, said Carlo Fidanza (EPP, Italy). Cristian Preda (EPP, Romania) challenged the fact that the EU had totally failed in the region, saying that results have been made and that they should persevere. In his view, the number one aim should be to push the Taliban out of Afghanistan. Also speaking for the EPP, Giovanni Collino of Italy called for greater transparency in funding, for perseverance in combating the narcotics problem and for greater international commitment. Marielle de Sarnez (Liberals, France) also believes it is necessary to have a real Union strategy in the region. Andrew Brons (NA, UK) agreed with this but said one should not forget that Afghanistan is not a democracy in the western sense. The Afghan people does not seem to understand the presence of the EU, added Jaroslav Paska (EFD, Slovakia) saying the Union therefore does not have the right to use force in order to impose its aid. Ioan Pascu (Socialist, Romania) called on Europeans to put forward a model for a state which reconciles western tradition with Afghan tradition, while Ivo Vajgl (ALDE, Slovenia), speaking along the same lines, proposed “working on the basis of values close to their (Afghan) values”. Several MEPs, such as Charles Goerens (ALDE, Luxembourg), raised questions regarding the talks underway with a view to including “moderate Taliban” in Afghan governance. “We should ask the Afghan women” what they think, he said with irony. “Without rule of law and without democracy”, nothing will be achieved, said Ana Gomes (S&D, Portugal), while Norbert Neuser (S&D, Germany) called on the Afghan government to show proof of willingness to combat corruption. Zbigniew Ziobro (ECR, Poland) called for commitment towards NATO and Afghanistan to be stepped up, and for an effort to be made to “convince people to stop growing crops for drug production”. (A.By./L.G./transl.jl)