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The merits of a possible change of strategy in Afghanistan by the European Union and its allies will be debated Wednesday afternoon by the European Parliament. A new report by Italian centre left MEP Pino Arlacchi calls for a more civilian based approach and for the Afghan Government to have the ultimate responsibility for who they talk to. Prior to the debate on Wednesday we spoke to him about his ideas.

Q: What is the main message of the report on Afghanistan?

PA: The main message is that the EU should start think for itself about Afghanistan. Too many mistakes have been made just because the EU followed the USA.

The USA are our friends and because they are our friends, we have a duty to tell them when they are making mistakes. The biggest mistake in Afghanistan - so far - is that the USA said they can win with military force in a country where this is impossible.

After the Kabul and London Conferences it has been finally accepted that the military approach failed and that we have to articulate the civilian strategy for Afghanistan. I am very happy that my colleagues from all political groups substantially contributed to the strategy and all amendments have been tabled in very constructive spirit. So the report ended up stronger than the original draft.

Q: How do you compare the situation nowadays in Afghanistan with the situation earlier?

PA: Times are a bit different. We are there with a huge amount of resources. We are there not only with troops, but also with civilian aid. The European contribution amounts to a budget of 1 billion euro per year.

There is also another budget of another 4-5 billion euro, this money will be more than enough to rebuild Afghanistan. But the paradox is that the social and economic situation in the country is not improving at all. It has not improved almost in the last 10 years. My report starts asking why and is proposing all proper corrections.

Q: What do you suggest concretely?

Only 20% of the money that we send to Afghanistan reaches the Afghan people, 80% of the money gets lost. That is partially because of the corruption of the Afghan government. But most of this money - and I stress very much this fact - is not due to the corruption of the Afghan government, but is due to waste, duplication, over invoicing, excessive and unnecessary expenses for consultancies and security. As this is international aid, we have the duty to intervene and change many things, giving more money to the Afghan government; at least 50% should go to them. So the main objective is the "afghanisation" of the aid.

The other big point of the report is the peace process. We must support it and involve the government of national unity to keep the cease-fire and negotiate a peace agreement, because this is the only political and diplomatic solution. The Karzai government should be free to decide who are its interlocutors, so if they decide they want to involve the Taliban and other insurgents; it is up to them. We should just have assurances that Al-Qaeda will be banished from the country, that the Afghan constitution and women's rights will be respected. And that opium cultivation will be eliminated, because this is a European interest. The main reason we should stay in Afghanistan is the fight against opium cultivation. Because 1,5 million addicts get their drugs from there.

Q: Do you think the publication of secret documents on the WikiLeaks website can endanger lives in Afghanistan?

I don't believe so; I read the documents relating to Afghanistan. Nobody is in danger. There has been a very responsible behaviour, firstly by WikiLeaks and then by the papers which got the documents. They deleted all references to names and places, which could endanger the security of somebody. We shouldn't be hysterical over this.