

Opening Intervention by Ana Gomes
Tackling Afghanistan's security and development dilemma

- Let me start by thanking the organizers for inviting me to take part in this policy dialogue:
- I was asked to do two things: first, to present the views of the European Parliament about the challenges Europe and the international community more generally face in Afghanistan; second, to convey my impressions of the visit I made to the country at the end of April;
- I will start with the Parliament: coincidentally, this afternoon the Foreign Affairs Committee will be voting on a report entitled *Stabilisation of Afghanistan: challenges for the EU and the international community*, which was initially drafted by my colleague André Brie and for which I am the shadow rapporteur of my party, the Socialists;
- I think we all agree that **stabilizing, reconstructing and developing Afghanistan is one of the most important tasks facing the international community at the moment** - and one that will take decades to complete;
- And that brings me immediately to **the main message of this report: it is not just Afghanistan that lies at a crossroads at the moment: the first paragraph of the report underlines (and I quote) that "the country has become a test case for international development assistance and of bi- and multi-lateral cooperation"; in other words, the entire international community - and not just the Atlantic Alliance - has their reputation on the line...**

- The report also calls for the **international community to reassess its strategy for Afghanistan**; it underlines the **need for additional combat troops unrestricted by the national caveats, but also for reinforced civil reconstruction efforts**; in fact, we stress that there is a **considerable discrepancy between the amount of money the international community is spending on military operations on one hand and on civil reconstruction and humanitarian assistance on the other hand**;
- The report also points out that the **military and political utility of Operation Enduring Freedom**, which is purely focused on counter-insurgency operations, **depends on the ability of the Afghan government to engage with those willing to lay down their arms and work within the political process**;
- The PRTs are one of the areas where our **recommendations are most detailed**: the Parliament (and I quote) "*strongly believes that the PRTs should concentrate on specific objectives related to security, training and working with the Afghan police and military, and supporting the reach of the central government into insecure areas*" and stresses that "*there is a clear line between military and humanitarian action that should be maintained, and therefore security and development professionals should play to their strengths and to their professional expertise*"; finally, we call for **more Afghan ownership**, through an increase in the number of Afghans working in the PRTs;
- I have to say that my own trip to Afghanistan helped me understand how important it was to avoid a crowding-out effect on NGOs and Afghan institutions caused by PRTs working in relatively stable regions and manned by countries that insist on sending their soldiers to

Afghanistan to perform tasks that have little to do with combat and/or peacekeeping;

- On the much-debated issue of an effective counter-narcotics strategy the report doesn't go into a lot of detail: it essentially calls for a long-term strategy primarily aimed at comprehensive rural development;
- In fact *the European Parliament has already put forward its recommendations to the Council in this field in a separate report approved in October 2007*; in it, **we presented a comprehensive strategy**, which **excludes fumigation as a method of eradication**, but **includes selective, manual eradication**; it also includes a **call for improved governance, especially in the Ministry of Interior, tackling corruption at the highest levels of the Afghan administration and targeted action against key traffickers on the ground**; and above all any successful counter-narcotics strategy will have to take into account the regional disparities and specificities within Afghanistan - **a one-size fits all approach will fail**;
- Finally, the Parliament also carefully raises the possibility of pilot-projects for small-scale conversion of parts of the current illicit poppy cultivation into fields for the production of legal opium-based analgesics, although **there is widespread skepticism in the Parliament and beyond about the feasibility of this approach, not least because the Afghan authorities tend to be quite reluctant to accept it**;
- On Europe's role in Afghanistan: I think a lot is being done; the most visible contribution is of course the European part of ISAF: in April this year there were about 47.000 men and women on the ground under the NATO flag, and 27.000 of those were European; **this mission is**

useful, and should stay for as long as it is needed; however, three things need to change:

1. First, **ISAF needs to move away from counter-insurgency activities and towards a military strategy based on the principles of 'human security'**; in other words, the overarching priority has to be the protection of civilians and not the destruction of a military foe;

2. Second, the **caveats have to go**: if Portugal's contingent of 170 soldiers was able to operate in Kandahar, so should Germany's 3.500; **we, the European politicians, need to inform our public opinion about the importance of peacekeeping operations in general and the stabilization of Afghanistan in particular**; succeeding in Afghanistan and winning elections should not be seen as incompatible goals - even in Berlin; and even by my fellow Social Democrats;

3. Third, I have already mentioned this, **the PRTs cannot continue to take up the role of development agencies in the areas that have been stabilized**; they should focus on security-related tasks *if*, and especially **where**, they are needed;

- **But Europe's contribution to Afghanistan goes way beyond NATO**: the European Commission for example has committed over a billion € to the reconstruction and development of the country between 2002 and 2008; some EU Member States have also made hefty contributions: Germany alone has committed €760 million;
- Unfortunately, however, these numbers don't tell the whole story, **as the proportion of funds that are actually spent on the ground is often lower than two-thirds of what is committed**; also, from the \$25 billion that were promised by international donors since 2002, only about \$15 billion ever materialized;

- In other words, whatever we may think is lacking in Afghanistan, one thing we should all agree on is that **Afghanistan needs more money, lots of it and on a long-term basis**; and Europe definitely needs to step up to the plate: I am quite certain that the Commission can count on the Parliament to loosen the purse strings for this important cause;
- **Another important European contribution is EUPOL Afghanistan**, which has an authorized capacity for 231 European staff, of which around 100 will be in the Kabul headquarters, another 100 deployed at regional and provincial level and 25 at the central government level, namely in the Ministry for Interior; this mission will monitor, mentor, advise and train; it will, for example, help reforming the Ministry of Interior (which is unanimously considered to be in dire need of urgent reform), it will help in the development of a national strategy for criminal investigation and it will also support a new anti-corruption unit to be set up by President Karzai to root out corruption in the criminal justice system;
- **The bad news is that with 231 staff and a meager annual budget of €43 million this mission is hardly adequate to make a strong contribution to the rule of law in Afghanistan; the good news is that at the end of May Member States decided to double its size**; after a very inauspicious start, the mission seems to be going well; it is still too early to make a clear assessment of its impact;
- So what does all this investment in European manpower, money and political capital mean in terms of political clout? *Not much*;
- Europe as such **is not really a strategic actor in Afghanistan; we are unable to strategically influence**

outcomes and are playing second-fiddle to the US, who seem to have a pretty clear idea of what they want:

even if it is often the wrong idea and even if some of the US' approaches - such as the chemical eradication of opium crops - can actually make things worse;

- Europe needs to understand that fighting poverty and underdevelopment in Afghanistan, or empowering women, or protecting civilians by military means, will not just help protect European cities from terrorism: it will also, in the long run, help us get rid of the scourge of heroin, weaken international criminal networks, and stabilize a region that suffers from endemic and contagious conflicts;
- Politicians like me need to explain to European citizens that we are in Afghanistan for the long haul and that if we fail, our lack of commitment will soon come back to haunt us; you can be assured that most of us European Parliamentarians are willing to do our best.