

Wednesday, 24 October 2007 - Strasbourg

Production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group . - (PT) I must congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Cappato, not only on this very useful report but also on his readiness to accept contributions in order to get as wide-ranging an agreement as possible.

His original intentions were laudable as he was trying to kill two birds with one stone: legalising poppy cultivation and opium production for medical purposes would not only have ended heroin production in Afghanistan but also the lack of painkillers worldwide.

Unfortunately, we came up against several practical problems, such as the fragility of the Afghan institutions and their inability to regulate opium production, the uncertainty as to the economic viability of such a scheme and the danger in allowing the reintroduction of opium in some of the thirteen Afghan provinces which have stopped production.

My Group's amendments tried to refocus the report on the essential element: the fight against opium production in Afghanistan which is affecting not only Afghanistan but also neighbouring countries. The drugs illegally produced from this opium constitute what some call the true weapons of mass destruction, particularly in Europe.

In the fight against opium production, we must be sensitive to the individual characteristics of the various Afghan regions. Only a combination of measures will be successful. Firstly, the corruption permeating the Afghan central administration, particularly the Interior Ministry and police, must be eradicated as this has paralysed all policies to combat opium production. Secondly, the 30 or so main drug traffickers identified in a 2006 UN and World Bank report must be sought, captured and put on trial so that this murderous trafficking can be stopped. Thirdly, NATO must support the Afghan operations to fight this trafficking, by destroying laboratories and stores and preventing drug transports. Fourthly, the poppy eradication actions must be carefully and selectively applied and concentrated in areas where farmers have real alternatives.

This brings us to the points of agreement with the rapporteur. We all oppose indiscriminate fumigation of poppy plantations, as has been advocated by the US, which will simply swell the ranks of the Taliban without substantially altering the production of heroin.

Finally, in the context of a package of measures to deal with the Afghan drug problem, the rapporteur's proposal for a pilot project for the legal production of opium-based analgesics should be studied. More than anything, this report tries to encourage the European Council to be creative and daring in the fight against heroin production in Afghanistan. There are no easy solutions to this problem, but we know that the terrorism and violent obscurantism advocated by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda will only be defeated when Afghanistan is freed from the clutches of drugs.

I am about to end, Mr President. This report must be viewed as an urgent appeal to the Member States not to spare any efforts in the economic and political reconstruction of a country which has been so badly affected by bloody conflicts and which is so important for regional and global security.