



Procedure file

Basic information	
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2007/2125(INI)
Production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan	
Subject 4.20.01 Medicine, diseases 6.40.04.06 Relations with central Asian countries 7.30.30.04 Action to combat drugs and drug-trafficking	
Geographical area Afghanistan	
Procedure completed	

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	AFET Foreign Affairs		17/04/2007
	Committee for opinion	ALDE CAPPATO Marco	
	LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
		The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	External Relations	FERRERO-WALDNER Benita	

Key events			
22/04/2007	Non-legislative basic document published	B6-0187/2007	Summary
06/06/2007	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
12/09/2007	Vote in committee		Summary
21/09/2007	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0341/2007	
24/10/2007	Debate in Parliament		
25/10/2007	Results of vote in Parliament		
25/10/2007	Decision by Parliament	T6-0485/2007	Summary
25/10/2007	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2007/2125(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 134o-p3
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/6/49985

Documentation gateway					
Non-legislative basic document		B6-0187/2007	23/04/2007	EP	Summary
Committee draft report		PE390.526	10/07/2007	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE392.263	24/07/2007	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0341/2007	21/09/2007	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0485/2007	25/10/2007	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2007)6028	21/11/2007	EC	

Production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan

PURPOSE: to propose a recommendation to the Council pursuant to Rule 114(1) of the Rules of Procedure by Graham WATSON, Marco PANNELLA, Marco CAPPATO and Annemie NEYTS-UYTTEBROECK on behalf of the ALDE Group on production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan.

CONTENT: according to the authors of the draft recommendation, the 2006 Report issued by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) on 1 March 2007 states that, in Afghanistan, the total area being used for illicit opium poppy cultivation increased to a record 165 000 hectares, an increase of 59% over the figure for 2005, and more than twice the figure for 2003. In addition, the report entitled 'Afghanistan: Opium Survey 2006' compiled by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stresses that last year the quantity of opium harvested in that country reached a record level of about 6100 tons, an increase of nearly 50% over the figure for the previous year. Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund estimate that almost 40% of the Gross Domestic Product of Afghanistan is opium-related, and that some 2.9 million people (12.6% of the population) are engaged in the poppy sector. The figures show that it will clearly be impossible to achieve the goals set by the political declaration adopted by the 1998 United Nations General Assembly in New York concerning the total eradication or substantial reduction of illicit crops by 2008, denouncing the fact that insurgents, warlords, the Taliban and terrorist groups find their major source of funding in trafficking in illicit narcotics.

On this basis, the European Parliament urges the Council to adopt a common position - pursuant to Article 15 of the Treaty on European Union - concerning a comprehensive 'counter-narcotics' strategy in Afghanistan, which should provide for the production of poppies for medical purposes to be used, in the PE framework of an internationally managed pilot project, for the production of opium-based analgesics for the national Afghan market and possibly for those countries that experience a lack of availability of opiates.

Production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Mr Marco CAPPATO (ALDE, IT) with a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan.

The report recalls that, according to the United Nations, Afghanistan produced 6,100 tonnes of opium in 2006, in other words, 50% more than in 2004. It also states that almost 40% of Afghanistan's GDP is opium-related, and that 3 million people are engaged in the poppy sector producing an income of 1,965 US dollars a year per family.

The report goes on to say that, in 2007, the farm-gate value of the opium harvest totalled 1 billion US dollars, or 13% of the licit GDP of Afghanistan. The total potential value of the country's 2007 opium harvest accruing to farmers, laboratory owners and Afghan traffickers is expected to have reached 3.1 billion US dollars, which represents almost half the country's licit GDP of 7.5 billion US dollars, or 32% of the overall economy, including the opium sector,

The European Union remains the biggest donor as regards efforts aimed at reducing the opium supply through projects that promote alternative livelihoods as a substitute for illicit crops. In parallel, Afghanistan has also introduced strategies to combat drugs and to replace opium production. The Afghan Government has also established a Drug Regulation Committee, which comprises officials from the Ministries of Counter Narcotics, Health and Finance, in order to regulate the licensing, sale, dispensation, import and export of all drugs for licit purposes in the country?

In this regard, the report calls on the EU to do more to bring about a drastic reduction in opium production since Afghanistan has practically become the exclusive supplier of the world's deadliest drug and that it has become the main source of income of local warlords, the Taliban and terrorist groups.

There is, however, a small glimmer of hope since the number of provinces that no longer cultivate opium has more than doubled (going from 6 in 2006 to 13 in 2007), and half of Afghanistan's illicit opium cultivation in the province of Helmand. The report considers that the fight against drug production in Afghanistan should reflect a differentiated approach by locality and be targeted on poorer regions with limited resources, which are the most dependent on opium in the first place.

A further issue was raised by the Senlis Council (an international think tank dealing with security and development issues) in 2007 and presented in a detailed technical dossier describing how poppies can be produced for medical purposes. However, according to the International Narcotics Control Board, supply is currently greater than demand and there is a global surplus of opiates for medical purposes.

For this reason, the Committee recommends that the Council:

(a) opposes, in the framework of integrated development programmes, recourse to fumigation as a means of eradicating the poppy in Afghanistan;

(b) elaborates and submits to the Afghan Government, within the framework of European sponsored illicit supply reduction programmes, a comprehensive plan and strategy aimed at controlling drug production in Afghanistan, by improving governance and tackling corruption at the highest levels of the Afghan administration (with a special focus on the Ministry of the Interior); targeting action against the key traffickers on the ground; improving comprehensive rural development, particularly in the poorest areas and in those not yet producing opium on a large scale; carefully and selectively engaging in manual eradication; and looking at 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;

(c) offers its assistance in the implementation of a scientific "Poppy for Medicine" pilot project that will further investigate how licensing can contribute to the alleviation of poverty, diversification of the rural economy, general development and increased security, and how it can become a successful part of multilateral efforts for Afghanistan.

Production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Marco CAPPATO (ALDE, IT) and made a recommendation to the Council on production of opium for medical purposes in Afghanistan. The resolution was adopted by 368 votes in favour to 49 against with 25 abstentions.

The report recalls that, according to the United Nations, Afghanistan produced 6 100 tonnes of opium in 2006, in other words, 50% more than in 2004. It also states that almost 40% of Afghanistan's GDP is opium-related, and that 3 million people are engaged in the poppy sector producing an income of 1 965 US dollars a year per family. The report goes on to say that, in 2007, the farm-gate value of the opium harvest totalled 1 billion US dollars, or 13% of the licit GDP of Afghanistan. The total potential value of the country's 2007 opium harvest accruing to farmers, laboratory owners and Afghan traffickers is expected to have reached 3.1 billion US dollars, which represents almost half the country's licit GDP of 7.5 billion US dollars, or 32% of the overall economy, including the opium sector.

Afghanistan has practically become the exclusive supplier of the world's deadliest drug, with 93% of the global opiates market. Parliament noted, however, that the number of opium-free provinces has more than doubled, from 6 in 2006 to 13 in 2007 due to successful schemes supporting alternative livelihoods and also expanded security in the north, as well as an effective awareness-raising programme including a system of rewards for good performers, and that 50% of the whole Afghan opium crop comes from the single province of Helmand.

Parliament stated that the growing opium economy and the danger of "state capture" by narco-interests pose a critical threat to development, state-building and security in Afghanistan. There are substantiated claims that insurgents, warlords, the Taliban and terrorist groups are obtaining the major part of their funding through trade in illicit narcotics.

The report went on to draw attention to the Senlis Council, an international security and development think tank, which presented a detailed Technical Dossier that describes how a village-based "Poppy for Medicine" project could work in Afghanistan, including an Integrated Social Control system, the production of Afghan medicines at village level, compulsory economic diversification and general rural development. According to a report by the International Narcotics Control Board there is a global oversupply of opiates for medical purposes. However, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has asked the international community to promote the prescription of painkillers, especially in poor countries, as severe under-treatment is reported in more than 150 countries where hardly anyone who is in need of treatment is being treated, and, in another 30 countries, where under-treatment is even more prevalent or where no data are available.

The European Union remains the biggest donor as regards efforts aimed at reducing the opium supply through projects that promote alternative livelihoods as a substitute for illicit crops. Parliament was convinced that the international presence needs to be complemented by an increased civil cooperation, in order to foster socio-political progress and economic development and also to win "the hearts and minds" of the local population. It felt that the extremely high costs and serious flaws in terms of effectiveness of a counter-narcotics strategy that does not take into account the regional, social and economic diversity of rural Afghanistan when developing and deploying measures on alternative livelihoods, and one that is based only on eradication. The fight against drug production in Afghanistan should reflect a differentiated approach by locality. Counter-narcotics efforts against farmers must be carefully limited to areas where licit livelihoods are possible (places where access to land and water resources is better, there is proximity to markets and land-person ratios are higher). Alternative livelihood programmes need to focus especially on poorer regions with limited resources, which are the most dependent on opium in the first place,

Accordingly, Parliament recommended that the Council:

(a) opposes, in the framework of integrated development programmes, recourse to fumigation as a means of eradicating the poppy in Afghanistan;

(b) elaborates and submits to the Afghan Government, within the framework of European sponsored illicit supply reduction programmes, a comprehensive plan and strategy aimed at controlling drug production in Afghanistan, by improving governance and tackling corruption at the highest levels of the Afghan administration (with a special focus on the Ministry of the Interior); targeting action against the key traffickers on the ground; improving comprehensive rural development, particularly in the poorest areas and in those not yet producing opium on a large scale; carefully and selectively engaging in manual eradication; and looking at 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. Production should be subject to strict on-the-spot surveillance which should in its turn be complemented with monitoring by an international organisation, such as the UNDCP, which supervises that production and prevents any diversion of the product to other, illegal, markets such as the heroin market;

(c) offers its assistance in the implementation of a scientific "Poppy for Medicine" pilot project that will further investigate how licensing can contribute to the alleviation of poverty, diversification of the rural economy, general development and increased security, and how it can become a successful part of multilateral efforts for Afghanistan ensuring that a mechanism is in place to exclude regions where recent achievements in establishing the rule of law and the subsequent elimination or reduction of cultivation may easily be jeopardised.