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WRITTEN QUESTION E-3357/01 by Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (PPE-DE) to the Commission.
Afghanistan and humanitarian aid from the European Union.

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by Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(5 December 2001)

Subject: Afghanistan and humanitarian aid from the European Union

As part of its reply to my question (H-0856/01(1)) regarding the dissuasion of Afghan farmers from producing and selling opium, the Council refers me to the Commission. I would like information on the priorities set by the Commission (ECHO) for the use of immediate humanitarian aid to tackle urgent needs (25 million) and, secondly, for the long-term utilisation of the total amount of 320 million which has already been allocated to the country.

Within the framework of this humanitarian aid and the development and reconstruction plan for the country, does the Commission intend to promote a policy of dissuading farmers from reverting to growing opium and producers from selling the stocks that they still have? If so, how does it intend to achieve this?

(1) Written answer of 14.11.2001.

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(5 March 2002)

After the United States, the Commission has, through the Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), been the main source of humanitarian aid for Afghanistan, providing 150 million since 1993. When that sum is added to food aid and assistance for Afghan refugees from other Commission departments, to wit the Directorate-General for Development (DG DEV), the EuropeAid Cooperation Office (AIDCO) and the Directorate-General for External Relations (DG RELEX), the EU has allocated over 430 million for the people of Afghanistan since 1991.

In 2001 ECHO mobilised 54,7 million. Food aid (28 million), aid for displaced persons in neighbouring countries (22,5 million) and aid for mine-clearance (about 10 million) took Commission-managed aid for the Afghan people in 2001 to 116 million. If the Member States' aid is added to this figure, EU aid in 2001 totalled more than 320 million.

Humanitarian aid allocated to Afghanistan by the Commission (through ECHO) prior to 11 September 2001 amounted to 23,4 million, most of it targeted on two vulnerable groups:

- People displaced by drought or fighting received help in the form of water-supply and sanitation programmes, the distribution of basic necessities and medical feeding programmes.

- Drought-hit communities received food.

Projects were slowed down by the departure of expatriate staff in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001. However, with the exception of mine-clearance projects, activities continued thanks to the skills and commitment of Afghan local staff.

The additional 25 million package from the emergency reserve of the EU budget, which the budgetary authority approved on 15 October 2001, has been used to adapt to the changing conditions in the field in terms of needs, access and security.

Following the first strikes by coalition forces an initial 1,5 million was granted to help the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reinforce its medical facilities throughout the country.

A second package, this time of 15 million, has been used to continue aid programmes to a million displaced persons and to supply food to communities that have stayed put.

A third grant, this time of 8,5 million, has enabled ECHO to adjust to new needs arising from recent developments in the military situation, which have seen the Taliban withdraw from most parts of the country: mine-clearance and training in the detection of new ordnance (cluster bombs) dropped by coalition forces, assistance to help people displaced by the fighting return to their homes, the establishment of machinery to assist the heavily bombed south of the country.

As for other instruments, the Commission, aware of the problems caused to farmers by the Taliban ban on poppy growing (it is reckoned that about 400 000 people were displaced for this reason), has decided, in the course of programming operations under Article B7-302(1), to finance alternative crops and sources of income in the provinces most affected by the ban.

Plans have been amended since the events of 11 September 2001 to take account of (a) the possible revival of poppy growing and (b) the aid pledged by the international community for reconstruction. Tackling illegal poppy growing and drug use will be a key cross-sectoral issue. It will definitely be covered by the 187 million package for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country (not counting humanitarian assistance), which the Commission is planning to mobilise in 2002, and by all future reconstruction efforts.

There is indeed a real possibility that a lack of central control and security problems in most of the country might result in the resumption of poppy growing. EU aid and support for the government will have to find alternative solutions through programmes focused on developing alternative crops and other sources of income for farmers.

International programmes could conceivably include a clause making aid conditional on a written undertaking from the regional authorities and local communities benefiting from development operations to reduce or give up poppy growing in their region.

In the matter of stocks, a distinction should be drawn between stocks of seeds and stocks of drugs.

To address the issue of seed stocks and poppy growing, the Commission is planning to cofinance a crop monitoring programme.

As for drug stocks, two things should be borne in mind: these stocks now mostly consist of heroin rather than opium and, though they have yet to be quantified or located, are probably in the hands of criminal gangs or organisations. This therefore calls for a quite different response to that for poppy growers. The aim here must be not only to locate and destroy stocks, which may very well have left Afghan territory, but to strengthen capacities to fight traffickers at regional level.

The Commission has therefore granted 400 000 for a programme to strengthen the capacities of Tajikistan's national drugs agency and is continuing its activities along the heroin trail with new projects in Central Asia, Iran and the Caucasus.

(1) B7-302 Aid to uprooted people in Asian countries. About 90 million has been earmarked for activities in Afghanistan over the period 2001-2004.