Relations EU/Iran

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The committee adopted the report by Michael GAHLER (EPP-ED, D) on the Commission communication. It was in favour of closer cooperation between the EU and Iran, and called for a "critical dialogue" under which increased cooperation between the EU and Iran would be closely linked to the question of human rights. The report also called on Iran to reconsider its policy in the Middle East and help reconcile the two objectives of creating a viable, democratic Palestinian State and guaranteeing the right of Israel to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders. Iran, it said, could use its influence to urge those movements with which it maintained relations to refrain from the use of violence. The committee welcomed the efforts and the willingness displayed by the Iranian Government to address the human rights issue, which was seen as a positive step towards normalising relations. It acknowledged the scale of the economic and social problems facing Iran, especially the growing and destabilising influx of refugees from Afghanistan, and therefore called for emergency, humanitarian and financial aid to be provided. It also welcomed the steps taken by Iran to combat drug trafficking. However, the committee expressed concern at certain developments since President Khatami's re-election, such as an increase in the number of executions. The human rights situation remained worrying, particularly regarding issues such as freedom of assembly, of expression and of conscience, the situation of women and the rights of minorities. Pointing out that any trade and cooperation agreement would contain a substantive human rights clause, MEPs called for the promised reform of the press and judiciary to be carried out, and for Iran to move towards greater democracy, to promote the measures needed to establish a democratic and open society and to implement the legal and administrative reforms needed to bring about real equality of the sexes and guarantee the practical application of fundamental rights and freedoms. The report also pointed out that closer trade and economic cooperation between the EU and Iran would be possible if Iran moved towards greater economic liberalisation, as provided for in its 1999 five-year plan. Lastly, MEPs stressed the importance of 'cultural dialogue', for example through parliamentary dialogue between the European Parliament and the Assembly of the Islamic Council, including the sending of delegations in both directions.