Afghanistan: challenges and perspectives for the future

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by André BRIE (EUL/NGL, D) on Afghanistan. Looking at the challenges facing the country and its future prospects, the report concluded that lack of security and the slow pace of reconstruction in Afghanistan had trapped the country in a "vicious circle". MEPs were primarily concerned about the situation of Afghan women, and believed that a strategy to improve the situation of women must be "a priority for the nation". They welcomed the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA), but called on the ATA to "regularly, publicly and unequivocally" condemn violence against women and girls. The report also urged the Council and the Commission to assist the ATA in setting up a country-wide system of safe shelters and support services to protect women and girls from further oppression. MEPs expressed support for the new Constitution adopted on 4 January 2004 by the Loya Jirga (Grand Tribal Council), which included a specific reference to the equal treatment of men and women. They remained concerned, however, about a number of issues such as limitations on the right of freedom of expression and freedom of religion. They also pointed out that the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) could not bring human rights violations to court. Another cause for concern was the fact that among the constitutional Loya Jirga members were commanders and warlords who might reject anything which they saw as strengthening the central government. The committee also believed that the lower amount foreseen in the EU's 2004 budget for Afghanistan (compared to 2003) was sending the wrong signal to the Afghan government and people. MEPs called for more funds to be allocated to the ATA's recurrent budget and asked the Commission to consider setting up a European Agency for Reconstruction in Afghanistan, on the lines of the agency working in Kosovo.