Afghanistan: challenges and perspectives for the future

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Andre BRIE (EUL/NGL, D) on Afghanistan. (Please see the summary dated 22/01/04.) Parliament warned against the use of excessive force by the US army against potential 'terrorist' targets, resulting in the deaths of civilians, including children. These operations may lead to the Afghan people rejecting the process of democratization. Parliament moved on to the priorities for support for economic and social reconstruction. These are: -high-quality education for boys and girls, -health care, particularly for women and children, -improvement of the infrastructure (roads, electricity, running water), -creation of irrigation systems in agricultural areas to make it possible to grow crops other than opium; Political reconstruction is a key part of the overall reconstruction effort. Parliament expressed its concern about the continuing delays in the registration of political parties and encouraged President Karzai to pursue his initiative to build a "moderate camp for a reform agenda" to support the peace process. Parliament also voiced its concern about grave flaws in the constitution, such as: -the absence of separation of powers, reflected in the fact that almost all power is vested in the president, the legislature having little power; -the role of Islam, in particular the fact that religious authorities have the right to control education and direct educational resources and the fact that Islam can be invoked to curb speech and political organization; -the rights of women and minority groups, reflected in the fact that there are no positive obligations on the state to preclude discrimination. Parliament drew attention to the fact that ethnic identification is central to contemporary Afghan politics. Ethnic representation and meaningful power sharing are currently insufficiently reflected in political institutions and security bodies. Afghanistan needs a parliamentary system which can ensure that the country's regional, ethnic, and religious pluralism is reflected in its power structures. The constitution also fails to address the future relationship between central government and the provinces. Parliament felt that it is imperative to increase financial support for the electoral registration and education processes if the elections are not to be delayed even further. The Commission is asked to support programmes to promote pluralism in the media and access to information, and citizen participation. The commission needs also to support NGO initiatives aimed at reconciliation and dispute resolution within communities. Parliament went on to stress its concern at the huge recent increase in illicit opium production in Afghanistan which fuels the power and role of warlords in the provinces concerned. The country could turn into an opium economy unless energetic measures are taken by the Afghan Government, affected countries and the international community. Restoration of the irrigation channels is the only way of enabling agricultural crops to thrive as an alternative to poppy-growing. Parliament called for clarity on the future of Afghanistan in regional energy policy, and in particular concerning the laying of oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia through Afghanistan. It concluded that Afghanistan must not be forgotten by the rest of the world once again, both for humanitarian reasons and because of its geo-strategic importance and the lessons that history has taught us.