

# Gender mainstreaming in EU external relations and peace-building / nation-building

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Libor ROUEK (PSE, CZ) on gender mainstreaming in EU external relations and peace-building/nation-building. The report states that although the EU Member States are party to all major international frameworks on gender equality and women's rights, and although a number of policy documents exist at the EU level, the practical commitment to furthering gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in external policies is still weak. Moreover, despite considerable improvements in the promotion of gender equality over the recent years, the main EU institutions – that is to say, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission – do not have enough staff appointed specifically to implement the declared gender objectives in the areas of external policy and enlargement.

In this context, MEPs stress the importance of adequate funding and of staff responsible for implementing gender objectives and they recall that gender mainstreaming requires not only high-level policy statements but also the political will of the EU and the Member States' leadership.

MEPs welcome the adoption of a "Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the UNSCR 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on women, peace and security", as well as guidelines on **violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them**. They call on those Member States which have not yet adopted their national action plans on UNSCR 1325 to comply as a matter of urgency. The Commission is invited to provide technical assistance and aid to third countries willing to develop national strategies for the implementation of the above-mentioned Security Council resolutions.

**Women's empowerment in EU external action:** MEPs call on the Commission to speed up its work and to propose by July 2009, in close cooperation with the Member States and the Council Secretariat, an "EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action", to be applied in the 27 Member States and in negotiations with third countries. They call on the Commission and the Council to systematically include gender equality and women's empowerment in the EU's political dialogue and policy discussions with partner countries. MEPs ask Parliament's delegations to address the issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment in its relations with third-country parliaments. To strengthen this approach, MEPs underline the importance of civil society organisations in women's empowerment. In this context, MEPs call on the Commission to channel adequate financial support to them and to promote the participation of women's NGOs in political dialogue processes with partner countries. The Commission and the Member States are asked to promote coherence in their policy approach; asks that the existing diverse policy frameworks be collated into an EU Consensus on Gender, covering both internal and external policies.

**Prioritise gender inequalities:** the Commission is asked to address and prioritise, in a more consistent and systematic manner, gender inequalities in the programming and implementation of the external assistance instruments, in particular as regards the provision of assistance for the reform of the security sector. MEPs insist that gender-specific objectives, activities and funding must be included in country strategy papers and that mainstreaming of gender issues through those strategy papers must be improved. They consider that the resources allocated to the health sector, and consequently to girls' and women's health, are insufficient in view of the EU's development policy commitments. There is a need to earmark further financial resources under the external assistance instruments for women's health programmes, according to MEPs.

MEPs point out that effective gender mainstreaming requires enhanced coordination between donors and actors, accountability mechanisms and increased ownership of the development process by national governments. They highlight in this regard the added value of the EC/UN Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace, and of gender-responsive budgeting initiatives.

The report stresses that the EU should pay special attention to the needs of the most vulnerable and socially excluded women, in particular disabled women, refugees and women from minority groups. The Commission is called upon to:

- further develop procedures, benchmarks and indicators in order to ensure that it fulfils its commitments with regard to gender equality in its external policy;
- implement the Brussels Call for Action to Address Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond;
- take action to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings.

MEPs underline that **rape** and sexual violence are used as a weapon of war and that they should be **punished as war crimes and crimes against humanity**.

**Gender mainstreaming in the EU's decision-making:** MEPs consider that the number of personnel currently working on gender issues within the Commission and the Council is inadequate. They call on those institutions to allocate more staff to the structures in charge of the EU's external action with specific responsibility for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. Member States are called upon to include more women in ESDP missions and operations, and that the participation of women at all levels and in all phases of the planning and implementation be increased. They underline the need to include gender expertise from the very start of the planning of a mission or operation. MEPs do note that a great deal of effort is currently being made to mainstream a gender-sensitive approach into the culture of the ESDP, however, they stress the need to develop the **qualitative conceptual framework** required in order to understand the socio-economic context in which ESDP missions are deployed (i.e. areas of conflict) and gender-sensitive concerns in the implementation of operations and programmes.

Moreover, MEPs welcome the appointment of a gender adviser to nearly all ESDP missions. However, they emphasise that the work of such gender advisers may be undermined by the lack of a concrete EU gender policy – in particular, a lack of gender awareness and/or an unwillingness to consider its importance – and the **lack of gender-specific budget lines** in the financing of ESDP missions.

Although MEPs commend the initiatives to provide gender-related training to staff, they suggest that compulsory training be provided **for all staff in missions and delegations**, including the management, and that they are given guidance on gender issues and women's empowerment.

MEPs are convinced that ESDP mission planning should take account of the inclusion of local women's organisations in the peace process, so as to build on the specific contribution which they can make and to recognise the particular ways in which women are affected by conflicts. They stress that, currently, **quotas are an indispensable means of ensuring gender equality** in peace and security missions and in decision-making in national and international reconstruction processes, and of guaranteeing the political presence of women at the negotiating table. They underline the importance of gender-sensitive budgeting and that special appropriations should be earmarked for gender issues and that benchmarks should be defined in order to measure how efficiently the funds provided are being used.