Resolution on the elimination of violence against women

2009/2681(RSP) - 26/11/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 25 November 2009 the European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on the elimination of violence against women. It notes that men's violence against women is not only a public health problem, but also an aspect of inequality between women and men, which is an area in which the EU has the mandate to take action. Men's violence against women is a structural and widespread problem, a phenomenon affecting victims and perpetrators irrespective of age, education, income or social position, and is linked to the unequal distribution of power between women and men in our society.

Parliament urges Member States to **improve their national laws and policies** to combat all forms of violence against women, in particular through the development of **comprehensive national action plans**, and including concrete measures to prevent male violence, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators.

Members note that there is a pressing need to introduce a **comprehensive legal instrument** aimed at combating all forms of violence against women in Europe, including trafficking in women. They urge the Council and Commission to establish a **clear legal basis for combating all forms of violence against women**, including trafficking. The Commission is asked to start work on drafting a **proposal for a comprehensive directive** on action to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women.

The resolution calls for the creation of mechanisms to facilitate access for women who are victims of gender violence or trafficking networks to **free legal aid** enabling them to assert their rights throughout the Union. It insists on the need to **improve cooperation among legal professionals and the exchange of best practices,** and to find ways of eliminating obstacles to the recognition of legal acts in other Member States, including sentences for gender-violence offences and injunctions against violent men.

Parliament also calls on the Commission, Member States and the EU, as appropriate, to do the following:

- to submit a more coherent EU policy plan to combat all forms of violence against women, as stated in the Commission communication "A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010", to include measures to combat and prevent violence against women in its action programme for equal opportunities for 2011-2016;

- to organise a high-level conference to be attended by representatives of political bodies, civil society and social organisations, with the aim of developing more coherent policies addressing all forms of violence against women;
- to guarantee the **right to assistance for all victims of violence**, regardless of the victim's nationality, and protection of female victims of domestic violence whose legal status might depend on their partner;
- to set up mechanisms to ensure that the gender-equality analysis of trafficking in human beings is part of all laws and policies aimed at combating trafficking;
- to ensure that female victims of violence have proper **access to legal aid** and to protection, irrespective of their nationality and the nature of their involvement in police investigations;
- to act to tackle the causes of violence against women, not least by employing preventive measures and undertaking awareness campaigns on the different forms that such violence can take;
- to embark on concerted action, including information campaigns, on domestic violence, as well as strategies aimed at changing the social stereotyping of women through education and the media;
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- to address violence against women and the gender-related dimension of human rights violations internationally, in particular in the context of the **bilateral association and international trade agreements** in force and those under negotiation. Parliament deplores the lack of a meaningful gender dimension in the compulsory sustainability impact assessments which are carried out prior to the conclusion of such agreements, let alone any acknowledgement of the issue of sexual violence, and of a set of tools to analyse gender impact.

The resolution calls upon Member States to do the following:

- to have due regard for the specific circumstances of certain categories of women who are particularly vulnerable to violence, inter alia, women belonging to minorities and female immigrants;
- to step up measures to prevent gender-based violence among young people by providing for targeted education campaigns and better cooperation among stakeholders;
- to provide assistance, under appropriate national programmes and financing schemes, to voluntary bodies which offer shelter and psychological support to female victims of violence;
- to introduce a coherent system for collecting statistics on violence against women, in close cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality;
- to recognise sexual violence and rape against women, **including within marriage and intimate informal relationships** and/or where committed by male relatives, as a crime in cases where the victim did not give consent, and to ensure that such offences result in automatic prosecution. Member States must reject any reference to cultural, or religious practices as a mitigating factor in cases of violence against women, including so-called 'crimes of honour' and female genital mutilation;
- to take measures to **stop female genital mutilation**, and either to implement specific legal provisions on female genital mutilation or to adopt such laws and prosecute all persons who conduct genital mutilation;
- to investigate the extreme human rights abuses against **Roma women**, penalise the perpetrators and provide adequate compensation to victims of forced sterilisation.

Lastly, Parliament calls for records concerning gender-based violence to play a central role within the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS).