Measures to prevent and combat mobbing and sexual harassment at workplace, in public spaces, and political life in the EU

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Pina PICIERNO ((S&D, IT) on measures to prevent and combat mobbing and sexual harassment at workplace, in public spaces, and political life in the EU. Members noted that according to the EU-wide FRA study of 2014 entitled 'Violence against women', one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence during their adult lives, and that up to 55 % of women have been sexually harassed in the EU.

General recommendations: stressing that sexual harassment is a violation of human rights, the report called on the Commission to submit a **proposal for a directive** to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls and gender-based violence. Members noted that women in the EU are not equally protected against gender-based violence and sexual and psychological harassment owing to differing policies and legislation across the Member States. The draft directive should therefore **include common definitions of the different types of violence against women**, including an updated and comprehensive definition of harassment (be it sexual or otherwise) and mobbing, and common legal standards on criminalising this violence. The Commission was also asked to present a **comprehensive EU strategy** against all forms of gender-based violence, including the sexual harassment and abuse of women and girls, drawing on testimonies in the form of women's stories and first-hand experience.

Furthermore, the report called on the Commission to:

- monitor the correct implementation of the EU directives prohibiting sexual harassment;
- compile examples of best practices in combating sexual and psychological harassment and harassment on grounds of pregnancy and motherhood in the workplace;
- obtain a clear picture of the issue of sexual harassment across the EU with better and scientifically more robust studies, including new challenges such as cyber bullying;
- ensure the systematic collection of gender- and age-disaggregated, comparable data on cases of sexual and gender-based discrimination and psychological harassment, including cyber harassment, at national, regional and local level;
- tackle emerging forms of gender-based violence, such as online harassment.

Violence in the workplace: Members noted that **reporting sexual harassment** at work could in many cases lead to the victim's dismissal or isolation within the workplace. A 2016 study found that more than half the women polled had experienced some form of sexual harassment in UK workplaces, but that four in five had not reported the harassment to their employer. The report stressed the urgent need for Member States, local and regional authorities, employers' organisations and trade unions to understand the barriers women face in reporting cases of sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination and violence, and, therefore, to offer **full support to women in reporting cases without fear of possible consequences.** It called on Member States to introduce policies that set out **prevention measures**, and **confidential procedures** to deal with complaints, strong and dissuasive **sanctions for perpetrators**, and **comprehensive information and training courses** to ensure that workers understand policies and procedures. Members stressed that companies should have a **zero tolerance** approach to sexual harassment and policies conducive to it.

Violence in political life: the committee called on all political parties, including those represented in the European Parliament, to take concrete steps to tackle this problem, including the introduction of **action plans** and the revision of internal party regulations to introduce a zero-tolerance policy, preventive measures, procedures to deal with complaints and adequate **sanctions for perpetrators** of sexual harassment and the bullying of women in politics. National and regional parliaments and local councils must fully support victims in the framework of internal procedures and/or with the police, and maintain a confidential register of cases over time.

Violence in public spaces: Members pointed out that sexual harassment is increasingly being carried out using new technologies, enabling perpetrators to feel safe under cover of anonymity. They called on the Commission to come up with a **definition of public space**, taking into account evolving communication technologies, and therefore to include in that definition 'virtual' public spaces such as social networks and websites.

The report asked Member States to:

- consider introducing specific legislation on harassment in public spaces, including intervention programmes, with a specific focus on the role of intervention on the part of bystanders;
- encourage awareness-raising campaigns in secondary schools and to include the issue of cyberbullying in educational curricula in schools and universities;
- establish a report system in schools to keep track of all cases of cyberbullying;
- remind internet service providers of their duty to protect their online consumers by addressing cases of repetitive abuse or stalking.