Minimum standards for minorities in the EU

2018/2036(INI) - 24/10/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by József NAGY (EPP, SK) on minimum standards for minorities in the European Union.

Approximately **8 % of EU citizens belong to a national minority and approximately 10 % speak a regional or minority language**.

Article 2 of the TEU states that 'the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the primacy of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities'.

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** has made the notion of 'national minorities' a term of Union law.

One of the three **Copenhagen criteria** clearly requires countries to guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities; whereas there is no further monitoring of minority rights once a candidate country becomes a Member State.

The need for common rules: recalling that there is no common EU standard for minority rights in the EU, nor a common understanding of who can be considered a person belonging to a minority, the report stressed the need to **protect all national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities**, regardless of definition. It recommended that, with respect to the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and non-discrimination, a definition of a 'national minority' should be based on the definition laid down by the European Convention on Human Rights. It also called on Member States to **end the condition of statelessness of Roma** and ensure the enjoyment of fundamental human rights by all.

Members called on the Commission to draw up a **common framework of EU minimum standards** for the protection of minorities; recommends that this framework should contain measurable milestones with regular reporting, and should consist, as a minimum, of:

- the drafting of **guidelines** reflecting good practices within the Member States, in cooperation with different stakeholders involved in minority rights protection;
- a **Commission recommendation**, taking into consideration existing national measures, subsidiarity and proportionality;
- a **legislative proposal for a directive**, to be drafted following a proper impact assessment, in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as applying in the Member States and based on the aforementioned points, on minimum standards for minorities in the EU, including clear benchmarks and sanctions.

Combating discrimination, hate crime and hate speech: condemning unequivocally all forms of discrimination and all forms of segregation, Members called on the Union and Member States to step up the fight against hate crimes and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour. They reaffirmed the position expressed by Parliament in its resolution of 25 October 2017 on the **integration of the Roma** into the Union from the point of view of fundamental rights. They encouraged the Commission and Member States to develop **awareness-raising activities** that sensitise the EU population to diversity, and to promote all peaceful forms of manifestation of minority cultures and to include the history of national and ethnic minorities and to promote a culture of tolerance in their schools as part of their curricula.

The Commission and the Member States are called on, *inter alia*, to:

- ensure **equal opportunities** for national and ethnic minorities to participate in political and social life;
- involve and support national and ethnic minorities and persons belonging to them in fostering knowledge and skills which are necessary in order to safeguard and sustainably manage and develop cultural heritage and which should be handed down to future generations;
- promote the use of regional or minority languages at local and regional level and in the **media**;
- ensure that, in line with international norms, persons belonging to national and ethnic minorities have their rights guaranteed and adequate opportunities ensured as regards **receiving education** in a minority language as well as instruction in their mother tongue, in both public and private educational institutions;
- allow and promote, **in the context of administrative authorities and public service organisations** , the use of regional or minority languages in practice, in line with the principle of proportionality, e. g. in relations between private individuals and organisations on the one hand, and public authorities on the other.

The report called on the Commission and Member States to continue to support and fund the **collection of reliable and robust data** on equality, in consultation with minority representatives, in order to measure inequality and discrimination. It called for effective EU-wide monitoring of the situation of national and ethnic minorities.