Gender Equality in EU’s foreign and security policy

2019/2167(INI) - 23/10/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 477 votes to 112, with 94 abstentions, a resolution on gender equality in the EU's foreign and security policy.

Women and girls may experience multiple forms of discrimination and are particularly affected by physical, psychological and sexual violence, poverty, armed conflict and the consequences of climate and health emergencies. Members stressed the need to mobilise, protect and support women in order to achieve lasting peace and security. Women's civil society groups and activists play a critical role in advancing peace and security agendas.

Furthermore, women remain largely under-represented and under-valued in policy and decision-making processes, including in the field of foreign policy and international security in the EU and worldwide.

Gender equality as a guiding principle of the EU's external action

Members called on the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Commission, EU agencies and Member States to systematically integrate the gender equality dimension into the Union's foreign and security, enlargement, trade and development policies.

The resolution stressed the need to maintain commitment to the implementation of the third gender action Plan (2021-2025) at the highest political levels. Members affirmed that 85% of official development assistance (ODA) should be allocated to programmes with gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, as their main objective.

Parliament recommended that the third gender action plan be accompanied by clear, measurable and time-bound indicators of success to enable monitoring of changes in the short, medium and long term. It called on the EEAS and the Commission to:

- step up efforts to implement a structured approach to gender mainstreaming in the budget process,

- recognise that women and girls are drivers of change and support their safe, meaningful and inclusive participation in civil and public life,

- pursue a values-based trade policy, aiming at ensuring a high level of protection of labour and environmental rights, as well as respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, including gender equality.

EU institutional culture

Members called for the creation of a new official Council configuration of ministers and secretaries of state responsible for gender equality to facilitate the integration of gender equality into all EU policies, including foreign and security policy.

Parliament pressed for the achievement of the target of 50% of women in management positions, including as heads of delegations and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations. Despite the progress made, it regretted that the EEAS is far from reaching this target, with

women representing only two of the eight Special Representatives and occupying only 31.3% of middle management positions and 26% of senior management posts. It called on the VP/HR to take the necessary measures to remedy this situation and on Member States to offer more women in senior positions.

Members stressed the importance of promoting gender equality in the Union's foreign policy, particularly in Parliament's relations with third countries. In this regard, they welcomed the decision of Parliament's delegations to appoint a gender representative in each delegation.

Prioritising the protection and advancement of women's and girls' rights and their participation

Parliament recalled the pivotal role of women in promoting dialogue, building peace and bringing different perspectives on the meaning of peace and security. It called on the VP/HR, the EEAS and the Member States to safeguard women's rights and ensure their full participation in the various stages of the conflict cycle, as part of the EU's conflict prevention and mediation activities.

The resolution called on the EU and the Member States to ratify the Istanbul Convention, the first legally binding international instrument on preventing and combating violence against women, in order to set a global example and give credibility to the EU's commitment to the eradication of violence against women in the EU's external relations. It also stressed the imperative of eliminating the use of rape as a weapon of war and oppression.

Lastly, recalling that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates all kinds of inequalities, including gender inequalities, Parliament stressed the need to ensure that the implementation of the EU's comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic takes into account gender issues and the specific needs of women by ensuring their participation throughout the programming cycle.