Union of equality: standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons, in the field of employment, in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the report by Sirpa PIETIKÄINEN (EPP, FI) on the draft Council directive on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and amending Directives 2000/43/EC and 2004/113/EC.

The committee recommended that the European Parliament **give its consent** to the draft Council directive.

The proposed Directive aims to set minimum standards for equality bodies, addressing their mandate, tasks, independence, structure, powers, accessibility and resources, to ensure that they can, alongside other actors:

- effectively assist victims of discrimination to access justice; and

- promote equal treatment and preventing discrimination.

Equality bodies and their staff need to be free from all external interference and this must be ensured by using all possible safeguards. Equality bodies must genuinely be able to be independent in their actions. For this, adequate funding that corresponds accordingly to the amount and nature of tasks of the equality body should be guaranteed.

Equality bodies should have the rights to act as a party in proceedings, to submit observations to the court or to initiate or participate in proceedings on behalf or in support of one or several victims.

Member States should also provide for the possibility for parties to seek an alternative dispute resolution to their disputes, for example through a conciliation and mediation process that can be led by the equality body or another existing independent dedicated entity which is not government related.

Member States need to ensure that equality bodies have appropriate mechanisms in place to cooperate with other equality bodies within the same Member State, and with relevant public and private entities, including civil society organisations, at national, regional and local level, as well as in other Member States and at Union and international level.