Women and fundamentalism

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Maria IZQUIERDO ROJO (PES, E) on women and fundamentalism. It pointed out that women were the main victims of religious fundamentalism and that millions of women world-wide were deprived of basic human and civil rights (including proper schooling and the right to vote) under fundamentalist regimes. The report's main premise was that respect for human rights and equal rights for men and women formed part of the European Union's established body of law (the "acquis") and that the rights of women should not therefore be restricted or violated on the pretext of religion, religious interpretations, cultural traditions, customs or law. It highlighted the problems of women belonging to migrant communities in the EU where the countries of origin had fundamentalist leanings, and warned that the defence of women's rights meant that opposing or incompatible rules or traditions should not be permitted to apply in the EU. The rights derived from the family law of the EU Member States should therefore prevail over those of the countries of origin, and Member States should adopt legislation to outlaw any practice which endangered the physical or mental integrity and health of women, such as clitoridectomy. Immigrant women should be informed of the laws against discrimination and should benefit from services to uphold their rights. The committee's other key recommendations included: setting up a Community exchange and mobility programme for students and professionals undergoing training, intended specifically for women; drawing up an information and training programme for women focusing on the influence of fundamentalisms; support for initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue in the context of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation; the pursuit of policies to curb fundamentalist influences, eliminate "ghettos" and offer women facilities as regards training, information and access to the new technologies; and support for NGOs working with women victims of fundamentalism. The Commission and Council were also urged, when applying penalties based on the human rights clause in association and other agreements, to take account of violations of women's rights inspired by fundamentalism. Lastly, the committee wanted the forthcoming directives on asylum procedures in EU countries to recognise fundamentalist persecution suffered by women as a reason for granting asylum and formal refugee status.