Violation of women's rights and Union international relations

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Miet SMET (EPP-ED, B) on violation of women's rights and EU international relations. Although the European Union had incorporated a human rights clause into all its agreements with non-EU countries since 1992, the report stressed that this was clearly inadequate when it came to protecting women, who continued to suffer unacceptable forms of violence often perpetrated in the name of culture and tradition. It pointed out that international implementation of human rights in practice tended to take less account of violence against women, which stemmed from the unequal nature of the relations between men and women in many societies. The committee believed that there were various measures which the EU could take in the context of its international relations to help combat violence against women. It wanted to see a comprehensive definition of violence, whether private or public, along the lines of the 1979 UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), included in trade and development agreements. These agreements should also include a specific clause providing for sanctions and, ultimately, the suspension of the agreement in the event of serious and repeated violations of women's rights (meaning widespread episodes of violence such as genital mutilation, mutilation with acid, public castigation, burning, blood feuds, stoning, raping, trafficking in women, "honour killings", forced marriages and slavery). However, careful consideration should be given to the impact of any sanctions or suspension on the population as a whole and on women and children in particular. MEPs also wanted the EU to adopt a "carrot and stick" approach by establishing favourable or unfavourable trade terms for partner countries according to their record for fighting violence against women and by establishing incentives for those countries according to their achievements in the fields of democratisation and the rule of law. Lastly, they called on the Commission to propose anti-violence measures and clauses in multilateral agreements, for example in the context of the WTO.