Combating child sex tourism

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In the report by Martin Schulz (PSE, D) on stepping up the fight against the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, the committee called on Mr Melchior Wathelet to resign office. However, the report, which was adopted by a resounding majority of 22 votes to 0 with 7 abstentions, failed to obtain a unanimous vote due to the reservations expressed by Mr Gerard Deprez (PPE, B) and other members, who considered that the resignation of a member of the European Court of Justice did not come within the remit of the European Parliament and that the rapporteur's initiative on this matter was misplaced and damaged Parliament's credibility. The report stated that Mr. Wathelet's personal decision as Belgian Secretary of State for Justice to allow the early release of Marc Dutroux, who had since been found guilty of murdering several children, may well have complied with Belgian law but it had had devastating consequences. The committee therefore called on him to take moral and political responsibility. The rapporteur stressed that the European Union should use all the instruments at its disposal under Community law and stimulate coordination at Community level of the national actions needed in order to combat this affliction in its fight against the sexual exploitation of children. In addition, Mr Schulz called on the Member States to harmonize a number of concepts in their criminal legislation as quickly as possible (especially the maximum age at which an individual ceases to be considered as a child for the purposes of sexual exploitation) and to criminalize the following: - paedophilic acts, - sexual tourism involving children, - child pornography, - failure to report acts or serious indications of paedophilia or abuse of children known to third parties as failure to assist a person in danger, and to make provision for similar sentences under their respective criminal legislation. Finally, the rapporteur called on Member States to guarantee special protection for the victims of sexual abuse by: - creating welcome, consultation and prevention structures; - protecting child rights and interests (confidentiality, privacy); - introducing vocational training and social rehabilitation programmes; - protecting the family insofar as it is the best environment in which children's basic skills can flourish.