Combating child sex tourism

1996/2192(COS) - 06/11/1997 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Adopting the report by Mr Martin SCHULTZ (PSE, D) on the sexual exploitation of children, the European Parliament called for tough measures to combat child sexual abuse and tourism. Parliament stressed that the European Union should use all the instruments at its disposal under Community law to combat this affliction and stimulate coordination of national actions at Community level. The European Parliament called on the Member States to harmonize quickly certain concepts in their criminal legislation (especially the age at which an individual is no longer considered to be 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. It also makes provision for the following preventive measures: - introducing information campaigns for families and people working in the education, health, justice, police or tourism sectors; - extending the European System for Information to the fight against the sexual exploitation of children; - prohibiting persons convicted of acts of paedophilia from exercising activities which bring them into contact with minors; - creating a European missing children centre; - setting up a free helpline in all the Member States for child victims; - ensuring that the tourism and advertising sectors refrain from inciting or engaging in propaganda in favour of sexual tourism; - providing financial support for NGOs engaged in the prevention and detection of sexual services involving minors and the possibility for them and child protection agencies to file complaints; - adopting a compulsory code of conduct governing the use of children in advertising campaigns; - providing financial aid for countries where poverty is rife in order to help establish substitute tourism and to promote actions to protect and rehabilitate child victims. It also makes provision for a series of repressive measures: - compulsory treatment of paedophiles; - prolonged detention or permanent internment in a psychiatric institute for repeat offenders; - criminalization of the production, sale, distribution, dissemination, exhibition or facilitation of the production, etc. of any pornographic devices or material produced using minors; - criminal prosecution of persons attending pornographic shows involving children and criminalization of the use of minors for pornographic purposes; - prosecution of individuals who have committed acts of sexual exploitation of children abroad; - indictment of companies organizing sexual tourism on the grounds of conspiracy; - confiscation of income from activities relating to the sexual exploitation of children and allocation of the sums confiscated to child protection organizations; - measures against travel agencies, airlines and hotel networks which promote sexual tourism involving children; With regard to rehabilitation, the European Parliament called for: - child victims to be guaranteed confidentiality during criminal proceedings so that they may testify without fear; - social aid, social rehabilitation and vocational training services; - reception, consultation and prevention structures to be set up; - protection for families. Even if social rehabilitation of the offender is to be the mainstay of penal law, the European Parliament called for priority to be given to the protection of minors. Finally, Parliament made provision for a specific chapter on the political and moral responsibility of Judge Wathelet of the European Court of Justice in the Dutroux case. It considered that where gross negligence, fault or failure to protect children is ascertained, those with political responsibility should bear the consequences of their acts and answer for whatever is or is not done at their instigation. It therefore considered that it was up to these persons to ask themselves whether they could legitimately continue to hold high office or stand for such office at either national or European level. The European Parliament therefore called on Judge Wathelet to take account of the specific demands made on a judge of the Court of Justice and to resign office. His personal decision as Belgian Secretary of State of 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 for which he must take moral and political responsibility.