Protection of minorities and anti-discrimination policies in an enlarged Europe

2005/2008(INI) - 08/06/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Claude MORAES (PES, UK) on the protection of minorities and anti-discrimination polices in the enlarged EU. (Please see the summary of 26/05/2005.) The main points of the resolution are as follows:

The political dimension and the urgent need for anti-discrimination policies and minority protection: Parliament felt that minority issues in the Union have not been high enough on the agenda of the Union and now need to be given greater attention. It pointed out the inconsistency of policy toward minorities - while protection of minorities is a part of the Copenhagen criteria, there is no standard for minority rights in Community policy nor is there a Community understanding of who can be considered a member of a minority. A definition should be based on the Council of Europe Recommendation 1201 (1993). It is clear that no single solution exists for improving the situation of minorities in all the Member States. Some common and minimum objectives for public authorities in the EU should be developed, taking account of past experience, in particular the best practices and the social dialogue underway in many Member States and certain international conventions.

The shortcomings in the Member States' responses to the measures based on Article 13 of the EC Treaty: Parliament was concerned about the unsatisfactory state of implementation of anti-discrimination policies. All Member States were urged to step up the implementation of these policies, in particular with regard to Directive 2000/43/EC and Directive 2000/78EC. In addition, the Commission should include as one of the objectives of the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All the need to find an adequate solution to various problems. These include late or incomplete transposition by Member States and the failure to set up equality bodies**.**

Furthermore, obstacles to the integration of third-country nationals need to be eliminated. Parliament called for greater coordination of national integration policies and EU initiatives in this field. Common basic principles for a coherent European framework for integration should include the fact that integration is a continuous two-way process involving both legally resident third-country nationals and the host society.

Minorities discriminated against on multiple grounds, including race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion, disability and age: Parliament warned against the possible discriminatory side-effects of measures against crime and terrorism, as there is evidence that ethnic minorities are five to six times more likely to be the target of police action, identity checks, etc. EU institutions, the Member States, all European democratic political parties, and civil society should condemn all acts of anti-semitism and anti-Muslim and anti-Christian behaviour, the revival of holocaust denial theories, the denial and trivialisation of acts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. They should also condemn incitement to racial hatred and homophobic violence, by both the state and private individuals**.**

Discrimination on grounds of gender: Parliament was deeply disappointed to note that, after a quarter of a century of equal treatment policies, the gender pay gap has hardly closed at all. It called for the development of a methodology for examining the interaction of ethnicity and gender and identifying forms of multiple discrimination and their effect on women and girls, so that this methodology may serve as the basis on which legal instruments, policies and programmes are designed and implemented.

Parliament drew attention to the multiple discrimination of migrant women or those belonging to national minorities (especially to the Roma/Sinti minority), and said a coherent policy approach was required.

The Roma community: This community needs special protection since, with the enlargement of the Union, it is one of the largest minorities in the EU and, as a community, it has been historically marginalised and prevented from developing in certain key areas and notes that Roma culture, history and languages are often neglected or denigrated.

The most manifest disadvantages could also be addressed by:

- the implementation of joint integration projects between the Member States where members of this community live;

- promoting common projects financed out of the European Regional and Development Fund;

- promoting knowledge of the language of the countries where members of this community live and supporting the preservation of Roma languages and cultural heritage, as a way of strengthening their own culture and self-image,

- improving access to employment, housing, social services and pension schemes.

New and settled immigrants – Parliament felt that recent immigrants may experience specific kinds of discrimination, which will differ in some respects from the discrimination faced by settled ethnic-minority EU citizens of the second, third and fourth generations of immigrants. It also felt important to distinguish between minorities of recent immigrant origin and those traditional national and ethnic minorities who are indigenous to the territory in which they live.

The resolution went on to deal with linguistic minorities, traditional or ethnic minorities living on the territory of a Member State, and stateless persons permanently residing in the Member States. Parliament suggested several additional legislative measures, as well as future economic and financial measures. The Union should complement the action of the Member States at local, regional and national level with adequate financing. There must be a comprehensive strategy to combat minority discrimination with the help of the Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Equal Community Initiative in particular.

Finally, Parliament called for Implementing measures and a proper feedback mechanism. Data should be collected on direct and indirect discrimination (i.e. the percentage of people belonging to national minorities among those living at risk of poverty and among the employed and unemployed, their level of education, etc.) so as to ensure proper feedback on the effectiveness of Member State anti-discrimination and minority-protection policies.