Equality between women and men: roadmap 2006-2010

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Amalia **SARTORI** (EPP-ED, IT) in response to the Commission communication entitled 'A Roadmap for equality between women and men'. It noted the Commission's determination to pursue the equal opportunities strategy on a multi-annual basis but pointed out that the Roadmap failed to specify the responsibilities of the Commission and the Member States as regards implementation and information to citizens. Parliament also objected that the Commission did not specify the funds that would be allocated to implement its recommendations.

The Commission was asked to draw up an overall framework for the assessment of policies and programmes to promote gender equality, including resulting national policies. Parliament felt that the European Institute for Gender Equality needed to be set up quickly so as to enable progress under the Roadmap to be constantly monitored. It called on the Commission to treat gender equality policy not just as a priority for the EU, but above all, as an indispensable requirement of respect for the rights of the individual. Such an approach should translate into an effort to coordinate and strengthen European and national measures providing for the legal protection of women and children. This applies particularly where women had been reduced to slavery or in cases involving crimes in the name of honour or tradition, of violence, trafficking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, polygamy, or deprivation of identity (for example when women are forced to wear the burka, the niqab, or a mask), the aim being zero tolerance. The Commission was asked to carry out research on the underlying causes of gender-based violence and, provided that a legal basis is determined, and present a proposal for a directive on combating violence against women. It was also asked to carry out a study on the causal correlation between legislation on prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation and to disseminate best practices, including actions taken relating to the demand side of such activities. Member States should withdraw the licence of doctors who perform genital mutilation.

Parliament went on to stress that respect for women's rights must be an essential condition of the EU's neighbourhood, foreign and development policies. The EU must show greater commitment towards political dialogue with third countries and to giving financial support linked to development, with a view to promoting gender equality. Action should be taken to prevent women from being marginalised as regards development programmes by guaranteeing them equal access to labour markets, to permanent and better quality jobs, and to means of production such as land, credit and technology.

Member States and the Commission were asked to take practical steps to promote the emancipation and economic and social integration of migrant women. This included measures to foster language skills and understanding of the rights and duties deriving from the laws applying in host countries (which, among other things, prohibit polygamy under the cloak of family reunification) and from the EU's core values.

Parliament noted that the challenges faced by the Member States and the EU in the area of gender equality were increasing as a result of intensified global economic competition and the subsequent demand for an ever more flexible and mobile labour force. Women continued to suffer from social, employment and other forms of discrimination and these requirements were likely to have a stronger impact on women than on men. The report called for national measures to help women enter the labour market on a footing of equal dignity and equal pay for equal work and for the implementation of concrete strategies to reinforce female entrepreneurship. Parliament asked Member States to appoint a national official to take charge of gender equality for the purposes of implementing the Lisbon strategy, whose task

should be to help draw up and revise the respective national plans and monitor their implementation so as to encourage gender mainstreaming and budgeting as regards the policies and targets laid down in the plans.

Parliament pointed out that the gender pay gap is still as high as 15%. It called on the Commission, as a matter of priority, to revise Council Directive 75/117/EEC, especially those points relating to labour inspectorates and the legal remedies available in the event of discrimination.

Lastly, the Commission was urged to encourage the creation of policies to reconcile family and working life, by ensuring, inter alia, that the cost of motherhood is borne by society as a whole, that care services and assistance are made more accessible and flexible, that fathers are actively encouraged to make use of available flexible working time options and take on household chores and family work (for example, by laying down an initial form of compulsory paternity leave) and by defining alternative methods of ensuring that women's pensions are covered where their professional careers have been too short or interrupted because of their increased family responsibilities.