

## Combatting racism, xenophobia and homophobia

Written by Dirk Goll on 2 December 2016 in EU Monitoring  
EU Monitoring

On December 1, the European Parliament heard statements by the Council and the Commission on the motion for a resolution to combat racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other forms of intolerance.



**Ivan Korčok, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic**, stated there can be no justification for intolerance. There can be no argument over the data provided by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and the Council of Europe, confirming an alarming rise of hatred and intolerance. An important tool is the 2008 Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia. Furthermore, the Council asked Member States to make efforts to report and monitor hate crimes. The Council has supported the efforts to support the situation of Roma people, Europe's largest ethnic minority. He welcomed the establishment of the European Commission's new EU High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. He then mentioned the importance of the work of the FRA. He said that the EU principles should be safeguarded according to the existing legislation. The EU has a responsibility because words can and do harm. Freedom of expression has its limits, he concluded.

**Sir Julian King, Commissioner for the Security Union**, replacing Commissioner Jourová, said that this topic is a major concern and the European Commission condemns all forms of intolerance. We all have the duty to fight hatred. Political leaders specifically have a role to protect these values and history should have taught us this. He mentioned the First Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights, held in October 2015 on "Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe". Specifically, these two forms of racism are growing nowadays. He noted that Jews are the target in 40% of all hate crimes in France. He underlined the significance of the 2008 Framework Decision on racism. Moreover, in the dialogues with Member States a series of issues have been raised. Six Member States have made amendments to their national law quite recently, overseen by Commissioner Jourová, which streamline their laws with the Framework Decision.

The Commission cooperates with the other EU institutions, Member States and civil society and he wanted the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance to cooperate closely with the EU High Level Group on combating racism. He then noted that data on hate crimes are assembled by the FRA. A Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online has been agreed as well by the Commission in cooperation with Microsoft, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter in May 2016. A preliminary assessment of the work in this area will be presented on December 7.

He highlighted the Rights, Equity and Citizens Programme, where €6 million of funds are available to tackle racism. Front-line practitioners and civil society are supported as well through the Radicalisation Awareness (RAN) Network, which tries to tackle radical propaganda.

**Kinga GÁL (EPP, HU)** agreed that intolerance is unacceptable. As a co-chair of the before-mentioned EP Intergroup on Intolerance he wanted the European Commission to focus on ethnic minorities which are often treated as second-rank citizens in their countries.

**Tanja FAJON (S&D, SI)** said that Europe is threatened by intolerance, as over 300 transgender people were killed last year. Brexit has had a negative effect, mentioning that also in her own country intolerance is rising. For her, prejudices and fears need to be addressed by education and we need to determine on which side we are in these historic times.

**Helga Stevens (ECR, BE)** mentioned the LGBTI group as a particularly vulnerable group. In quite a few EU countries these people are discriminated against. You can never use religion as a reason for discrimination. Inclusion needs to be our goal.

**Catherine Bearder (ALDE, UK)** said that the Brexit campaign and result has incited hate and hate crimes. Many EU citizens living in the UK have been scared and she was critical of the UK for not being tolerant and open nowadays. Hatred must be condemned publicly by everyone.

**Barbara Spinelli (GUE/NGL, IT)** said that the legal pathways are the most efficient ones to fight intolerance. Everyone belongs to more than one community and has more than one identity. Therefore, people should not be pushed into one corner or the other.

**Ulrike Lunacek (Greens/EFA, AT)** said that attacks against black people, born in the UK, and other minorities have risen since the Brexit campaign. Member States should be confronted with the legislation in place. The Equal Treatment Directive needs to be implemented urgently as well.

**Tibor Szanyi (S&D, HU)**, raising a blue card, said that the Orbán government in Hungary is inciting hatred, often with the use of EU money. Can anything be done against this, he asked Ms Lunacek.

**Ulrike Lunacek** wanted the EU Mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights to

be implemented quickly, on which an agreement was recently reached.

**Kristina Winberg (EFDD, SE)** said that if a people wish to express their views on migration they are labelled as racist and populist. Is it racist to want border checks, just to make sure women and children are safe? Is it racist for people to love their country? How can you ask our citizens to be more tolerant in the face of intolerance?

**Maria Grapini (S&D, RO)** wondered if it would not be possible to promote our cultures without degrading others?

**Kristina Winberg** responded by saying that the Swedish culture is already being lost in schools in Sweden, which needs to be protected.

**Vicky Maeijer (ENF, NL)** said that the Brussels elite continues to depict her group as extremists. However, she found that we need to show the citizens that we are stronger than the elite.

**Diane Dodds (UK, NI)** found hate crime to be unacceptable and mentioned that qualifications need to be accepted equally for all citizens, mentioning an example from Northern-Ireland.

**Monika Hohlmeier (EPP, DE)** underlined that all minorities need to be protected and not be used as a political tool. Put an end to exclusion in Europe, she urged everyone.



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