

EU must urgently combat rising Afrophobia

Written by Cécile Kashetu Kyenge on 15 December 2017 in Opinion
Opinion

Like many people of African descent, Cécile Kashetu Kyenge has been subjected to racist abuse - it's time policymakers act to put an end to this, she writes.



Cécile Kashetu Kyenge | *Photo credit: Bea Uhart*

As co-President of Parliament's anti-racism and diversity intergroup and given my own background, I take a specific interest on the issue of Afrophobia. Afrophobia is a specific form of racism that refers to any act of violence or discrimination, fuelled by historical abuses and negative stereotyping, leading to the exclusion and dehumanisation of people of African descent.

On 5 December, for the first time, the European Commission held a specific session on Afrophobia during the fourth high-level group on racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. This brought together relevant actors and experts that have a direct role in dealing with legislation and policies relating to this issue. The high-level group is important given the rise of racism, xenophobia and

intolerance across the EU.

Justice Commissioner Vera Jourová, along with her colleagues from DG JUST, should be commended for initiating it as well as for their excellent work and commitment in this field.

RELATED CONTENT

- [Anti-racism campaigners criticise 'Zwarte Piet' tradition](#) [1]
 - [Karen Taylor: The state of denial about anti-Black racism in Europe must end](#) [2]
 - [Sarah Isal: Racism and xenophobia destroys EU social cohesion](#) [3]
 - [Jallow Momodou and Malin Björk: Afrophobia is 'a reality confronting millions of Europeans'](#) [4]
 - [Cécile Kashetu Kyenge: We need to think about immigration in extremely rational terms](#) [5]
-

The focus on Afrophobia is particularly welcome given the Council of Europe's Commissioner for human rights recent commentary on Afrophobia and presentation of the EU Fundamental rights agency EU minorities and discrimination survey results.

In particular, I want to highlight the issue of hate crimes and incitement to hatred against black Europeans and people of African descent. Stereotypes about Africa and people of African descent that date back to colonialism are still prevalent in almost every single European country. There are, sadly, a number of examples where black Europeans and people of African descent have been targeted because of their appearance.

In my own case, I have constantly been addressed with racist speech against me since my election to the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

A current member of the European Parliament, Mario Borghezio, was the first to articulate racist remarks, calling my nomination as Minister "a shitty choice" made by a "bongo-bongo" government. He also articulated words that suggested that African civilisation is inferior.

His case was discussed by the Parliament's constitutional affairs committee, which decided to remove his immunity. Parliament stated that xenophobia and racism are not political opinions, and are outside of an MEP's immunity. Thanks to this decision, Borghezio was tried by the court of Milan for defamation aggravated by racial motivations. He was sentenced to a pay fine and compensation to me.

However, the Italian Parliament did not reach the same conclusion when it was examining the case of the Vice-President of the Italian Senate, Roberto Calderoli. Calderoli, in a public meeting, compared me to an orangutan, saying, "When I see pictures of Kyenge I cannot but think of the features of an orangutan."

An Italian court decided to prosecute him for racism, asking the Senate for the authorisation to proceed. However, Italian senators denied the authorisation, stating that the words pronounced by Calderoli had nothing to do with racism. These words were compared to satire and, for that reason, the senators considered it an issue of defamation.

The case has been submitted to the Constitutional Court, stating that the senators had intervened in a matter that was outside their powers. The Italian constitutional judges will hear the first arguments

next year.

These are extremely hateful campaigns based on verbal harassment and cyberbullying. They serve a purpose, which is deterring and discouraging black Europeans and people of African descent from running for elected positions or advocating on behalf of their community.

We need to do more to prevent negative stereotyping and to promote rights-based values. In the European Parliament, we have adopted new rules of procedure that allow the President to take action against any MEP that engages in racist, xenophobic or defamatory speech.

The rules of procedure need to go further and the Parliament should put forward a proposal for an internal independent monitoring system, where people can register incidents of racist, xenophobic and defamatory speech.

Member states can also lead by ensuring the transposition and implementation of the Council framework decision on combatting certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.

The continuation and improvement of the Commission's code of conduct with IT companies is also an important soft policy tool in relation to hate speech online. It will require continued strong cooperation between the private sector and civil society to ensure the best results.

To ensure these steps are taken, I will continue in my work, along with other committed colleagues, to raise awareness of Afrophobia. We are pushing for a European Parliament resolution on Afrophobia and organising a week highlighting this phenomenon, as well as hate crimes and incitement to hatred.

It is more important than ever for all of us to work together against all forms of discrimination. We must fight for all of our rights and against all forms of discrimination to ensure social cohesion and integration.

About the author

Cécile Kashetu Kyenge (S&D, IT) is co-President of Parliament's anti-racism and diversity intergroup

Tags

[Culture and Education](#) [6]

[European Commission](#) [7]

[Justice and Rights](#) [8]

Categories

[Education and skills](#) [9]

[Public order, justice and rights](#) [10]

[Society and welfare](#) [11]



Site Sections

- [Home](#)
- [Content](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Magazines](#)
- [PM+](#)
- [Thought Leader](#)
- [Climate Crisis](#)
- [Editorial Calendar](#)
- [Policy Events](#)
- [Event Coverage](#)
- [MEP Awards 2020](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Services

[Dods PeopleDods](#)
[MonitoringDods](#)
[ResearchDods](#)
[EventsDods](#)
[Training](#)

Media & publishing titles

[Politics HomeThe](#)
[HouseThe](#)
[Parliament](#)
[MagazineHolyrood](#)
[Total PoliticsPublic](#)
[Affairs NewsCivil](#)
[Service](#)
[World](#)
[PublicTechnology](#)
[Training](#)
[JournalDods](#)
[Parliamentary](#)
[CompanionVacher's](#)
[Quarterly The](#)
[European Union and](#)
[Public Affairs](#)
[Directory](#)

Dods events

[Westminster](#)
[BriefingDigital](#)
[Health & Care](#)
[ScotlandMEP](#)
[AwardsThe Skills](#)

[SummitScottish
Public Service
AwardsPublic Sector
Procurement
SummitPublic
Sector ICT
SummitCyber
Security
SummitCyber
Security
2017Training
Journal Awards](#)

**Partnership
events**

[The Health and
Care Innovation
ExpoCivil Service
LiveCivil Service
AwardsChief
Nursing Officer for
England's
SummitWomen into
LeadershipThe
Youth Justice
ConventionSocitm
Spring
ConferenceNHSCC
Annual Members'
EventDods at Party
Conference](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)[Terms & Conditions](#)[Advertising](#)[Sponsorship](#) [Subscriptions](#)

Source URL: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/eu-must-urgently-combat-rising-afrophia>

Links

- [1] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/anti-racism-campaigners-criticise-zwarte-piet-tradition>
- [2] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/blog/state-denial-about-anti-black-racism-europe-must-end>
- [3] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/racism-and-xenophobia-destroys-eu-social-cohesion>
- [4] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/afrophobia-reality-confronting-millions-europeans>
- [5] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/interviews/c%C3%A9cile-kashetu-kyenge-we-need-think-about-immigration-extremely-rational-terms>
- [6] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/culture-and-education>
- [7] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/european-commission>
- [8] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/justice-and-rights>
- [9] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/education-and-skills>
- [10] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/public-order-justice-and-rights>
- [11] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/society-and-welfare>