

Sexual Harassment: European Parliament must shift from words to action

Written by Jeanne Ponte and Pia Micallef on 22 November 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

The European Parliament needs to up its game on guaranteeing its employees a work place free of sexual harassment, argue Jeanne Ponte and Pia Micallef.



Photo credit: European Parliament AudioVisual

One thousand European Parliament workers have given the message loud and clear; sexual harassment is a long-standing problem and action must be taken.

In a resolution adopted by a majority of members in October 2017, parliament called for better internal measures to address the problem of sexual harassment in order to create a safe space for victims to help them come forward and report such abuses of power.

One year later, no victims have come forward with any formal complaints to parliament's Committee on Sexual Harassment. However, putting the blame for this lack of reporting on victims is the easiest solution for those responsible.

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The fact is that victims simply do not feel safe enough to come forward and the structures within the European Parliament are not adequate to give safeguards to victims. Putting all the responsibility on the shoulders of victims gives them the message that they must find their own solutions.

In the eyes of victims, this is amplified by the reaction of some high-ranking politicians, who claim that since there are no complaints being reported, that means there is no problem.

Our blog, www.metooep.com [7], proves otherwise. The blog features numerous testimonials of rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and sexism which have occurred within the European Parliament.

These cases of abuse of power and grossly inappropriate conduct have occurred within the building itself, during missions and work events outside the building. Victims range from policy advisors, to assistants, to administrative staff and service staff.

“Victims simply do not feel safe enough to come forward and the structures within the European Parliament are not adequate to give safeguards to victims”

This blog acts as a safe space where victims can confidentially share their stories, to ensure that their voices are heard, and their stories are not forgotten. This blog empowers the victims, by serving as a safe space where

they can take the first step towards recovery, share their story and get the necessary support. But this is not enough. There need to be adequate structures in place for victims.

This is why our movement is fighting for the full implementation of the following three points adopted by the European Parliament in its October 2017 resolution: an external assessment of the functioning of the European Parliament's structures carried out by independent experts; mandatory training on respect and dignity at work for all, including MEPs, and a 'one-stop-shop' dealing with complaints on sexual harassment, composed of independent experts including doctors and lawyers.

We demand the full implementation of the resolution, which will allow parliament to work towards

guaranteeing us, as workers, a safe space to work in. As an institution elected by and representing European citizens, parliament should set the standards for respect and dignity in the workplace.

This is why, ahead of the European elections that will take place in May 2019, we are calling on all candidates to ensure that the next parliament will have adequate internal rules in place that guarantee a transparent, thorough, timely, inclusive and fair treatment of all harassment complaints.

We want to make the fight against sexual harassment a crucial campaign element and encourage all prospective candidates ready to make this happen to contact us on metooeu@gmail.com [8] to get involved.

About the author

Jeanne Ponte and Pia Micallef are the co-founders of #MeTooEP

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