

#MeTooEP: Actions speak louder than words

Written by Jeanne Ponte and Alfiaz Vaiya on 6 March 2019 in Opinion
Opinion

MEP candidates should commit to reform and sign the #MeTooEP election pledge, write Jeanne Ponte and Alfiaz Vaiya



Photo Credit: European Parliament

On International Woman's Day 2018, 1000 European Parliament staff signed a petition calling for an end to sexual harassment and abuse in the institution.

This led directly to the creation of "Me Too EP". This is a grouping of staff in the parliament that - despite holding different political views, opinions and work positions - have united to fight sexism, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

We launched our blog in October 2018 with the aim of exposing the reality of what is currently happening in the parliament and providing a safe space for victims of sexual harassment.

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It sets out our demands for reform and provides evidence of sexual harassment and abuse through anonymous testimonies.

For 18 months we have been calling for full implementation of the resolution adopted in October 2017, where they agreed on better internal measures including our three demands for reform.

These three reforms are: an external assessment of the Parliament; mandatory training for MEPs, and the creation of an accessible, effective and independent structure for dealing with harassment reports.

The fight against sexual abuse and harassment is a shared goal that should be a priority for all institutions. Across Europe, different organisations are seeking solutions and trying to implement best practices in order to tackle these problems seriously in various institutions of power.

"The fight against sexual abuse and harassment is a shared goal that should be a priority for all institutions"

The EU Ombudswoman recently presented a report of her assessment of the European Institutions, while the Council of Europe published a report of the 47 national assemblies.

We have been pressing the parliament's leadership and authorities for action. Such a hierarchical institution will only reform if its leadership and authorities are willing to change.

The Parliament's President and office have spoken about the need to combat sexual harassment and abuse; the President smeared lipstick on his face in support of the elimination of violence against women.

However, to date we have seen only talk and small gestures. The President and his office remain silent on implementing reform.

"This is not a political or gender issue; we can all be victims of sexual harassment and abuse. In addition, we ask those who do not want to sign our pledge as well as the leadership and authorities, "why not?""

An example is their failure on our three demands for reform, even after the Conference of Presidents

called for them following our advocacy efforts. In response to the leadership and authorities' failure to deliver, we have decided to make the fight for gender equality and equal treatment for all a central campaign element.

At a conference on 6 February, we launched an election pledge for all MEP candidates to sign. This commits them to advocating for reform in the next mandate 2019-2024, including to our three demands, as well as committing to wider change in society through legislation and policies on equality.

We have taken responsibility for speaking out because we do not want others to suffer in the same way as those victims who have come forward with their testimonies.

We want victims to feel safe to speak out and that the structures within the Parliament provide adequate safeguards for them. We cannot understand why our institution does not implement the necessary reforms.

This is not a political or gender issue; we can all be victims of sexual harassment and abuse. In addition, we ask those who do not want to sign our pledge as well as the leadership and authorities, "why not?"

About the author

Jeanne Ponte and Alfiaz Vaiya are the co-founders of #MeTooEP

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