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*Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities*

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**2000/2174(INI)**  
REV

23 May 2001

## **DRAFT REPORT**

on women and fundamentalism  
(2000/2174(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities

Rapporteur: María Izquierdo Rojo



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## PROCEDURAL PAGE

At the sitting of 8 September 2000 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report, pursuant to Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure, on women and fundamentalism and the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs had been asked for its opinion.

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities had appointed María Izquierdo Rojo rapporteur at its meeting of 19 June 2000.

The committee/It considered the draft report at its meeting(s) of ... .

At the latter/last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution by ... votes to ..., with ... abstention(s)/unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: ... chairman/acting chairman; ... and ..., vice-chairman/vice-chairmen; ..., rapporteur; ..., ... (for ...), ... (for ... pursuant to Rule 153(2)), ... and ... .

The opinion of the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs is attached

The report was tabled on ....

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

### European Parliament resolution on women and fundamentalism (2000/2174(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 16, 18, 23 and 26 thereof,
  - having regard to Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community and Declaration No 11 annexed to the Treaty on European Union on the status of churches and non-confessional organisations,
  - having regard to the 1981 United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW),
  - having regard to its resolution of 1998 on 'fundamentalism and the European legal order',
  - having regard to its resolution of 16 September 1998 on Islam and European Averroës day<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the conclusions of the hearing on women and fundamentalism held on 23 January 2001,
  - having regard to the European Charter of Fundamental Rights of 2000, and in particular the second paragraph of the preamble thereto and Articles 9, 10 and 14,
  - having regard to the document 'Memory and Reconciliation' presented by the International Theological Commission of the Holy See on 7 March 2000,
- A. whereas the concept of fundamentalism originated in the 1920s in the USA, where it primarily referred to Christianity; whereas this fundamentalism was characterised by extreme obedience to dogma, which was interpreted literally and placed above the law of the state and human rights; whereas nowadays there are different variants of fundamentalism and they exist within various religions, including Christianity as well as Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism; whereas, irrespective of its forms or expressions, fundamentalism may become a threat to and assault on peace, freedoms and human rights, including, in this case, women's rights,
- B. starting from the premise that this serious problem posed by fundamentalisms and its impact on the life of women needs to be tackled politically, seeking to contribute appropriate proposals which can be of use in combating them,
- C. noting that, throughout history and in our times too, women have been and are among the main victims of religious fundamentalisms; bearing in mind the seriousness of the historical events stemming from the political use of religious fervour and the

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 313, 12.10.1998, p. 104

consecration of patriarchal honour; pointing out that making religions a fundamentalist instrument has been and is a source of violations of individual rights,

- D. whereas the majority of religions have suffered from this kind of fundamentalist or traditionalist degeneration, in different forms, at some time in their history,
- E. whereas the aims and interests of fundamentalists include those of setting themselves up as guardians and defenders of the purities and quintessential features of a particular belief, whether religious, philosophical, ideological, economic, political, scientific or technical, and once they have taken on this role they use their power to establish their own legitimacy or legitimise their actions, to subjugate women or different human beings, to shield themselves against cultural influences, to deify a race or people, to preserve the prerogatives of certain elites or to maintain privileges, giving rise to fanaticism of all kinds,
- F. deploring the exclusion of women from the processes of democratic change in certain countries in the wake of fundamentalist pressure,
- G. recognising the major influence of different forms of fundamentalism despite the postures of denial involved; noting the various modalities that exist and their complexity, contradictions and multifaceted identity; recognising that this is an essentially collective phenomenon which is not foreign to our European culture; noting that as regards women's status and problems the influence exerted by fundamentalist groups is incomparably greater than their fairly limited institutional or political power,
- H. whereas the similarity of fundamentalism with totalitarian political regimes has been demonstrated, given that traditionalists consider themselves to be in possession of the truth and to monopolise it and, enclosed in their certainty, decide to impose, in the name of the general good, their rules of thought and action upon all individuals and the whole of society by whatever violent or inhuman means,
- I. stressing that its extremist manifestations give rise to abuse and violence which tend to be directed at those taking opposing positions or holding different beliefs; that they frequently create a climate of terror and use the pedagogics of fear; and that the principles adopted by fundamentalists must not be opposed to or made incompatible with democratic rights and freedoms,
- J. whereas fundamentalisms have a devastating impact on culture, the arts and science, imposing intellectual totalitarianism, persecuting and eradicating freedom of thought and creativity, giving rise to threats against and murders of intellectuals and artists,
- K. rejecting all historically bankrupt approaches which have sought to fight fundamentalism with other types of fundamentalism of an opposite kind; taking the view that antidotes are provided by the fostering of rights and freedoms, respect for all individuals, secularisation, openness, women's emancipation, the promotion of ideological and cultural diversity, pluralist coexistence, the exercise of dialogue and political flexibility, the free expression of ideas, beliefs and ways of living, and gradualist and relativist notions which can be set against reductionist simplifications,

- L. recognising the wisdom of those who advocate secularisation or separation between public affairs belonging to the political sphere and religious convictions and beliefs which must be free and respected and which fall within the private domain of individuals,
- M. whereas the place occupied by religion in a social and political group can cover an extremely wide range of possibilities; whereas the margin of autonomy for the human will as against the divine will may differ,
- N. whereas states should guarantee individual rights and freedoms and the recognition of freedom of belief,
- O. expressing serious reservations with regard to regressive ideologies which are nostalgic for times past and claim to possess answers for women's role in the future based on retrograde positions from the past; denouncing processes of partial state modernisation which seek to modernise only in the economic and technological areas, preserving the basic features of an obsoletely patriarchal society,
- P. starting from the premise that the process of women's emancipation and liberation is, in social and anthropological terms, an aspect of the historic progress of humankind and that religious fundamentalisms may represent a step backwards and a diversion, or the annihilation of the rights which women require; stressing that women's situation is linked to the degree of freedom and development in a country: where there is freedom, women prosper, but where there is no real freedom, women are the first to suffer,
- Q. whereas the notion of modernity is not culturally exclusive nor one-sided; bearing in mind that there is also no 'single pattern' for women's emancipation; and pointing out that universal human rights do not impose a cultural norm but a legal norm to provide minimum protection, below which human dignity ceases to exist,
- R. noting that fundamentalists tend to slow modernity down and that this is at the root of the persecution from which women suffer, given that women are now the bearers of modernity, since when women modernise, the whole of society modernises too; saluting those countries which are fighting fundamentalism and promoting women's rights,
- S. whereas problems of identity, disappointment or rejection among peoples, societies and cultures, as well as social inequalities and failures (which are in some cases acted on by fundamentalist groups where the state does nothing), sometimes lead to dangerous religious extremisms; for example, many fundamentalisms in the third world had their origins in a reaction to the cultural and development model which certain western powers and fundamentalisms sought to impose upon them,
- T. noting that, paradoxically, it is traditionalists and official fundamentalisms that, despite considering themselves to be defenders of purity, embody the worst image of a belief-system, which is precisely the image which its detractors wish to convey,

- U. recognising that Islamic fundamentalism finds fertile ground within the EU among uprooted immigrant populations, who are victims of unemployment and a wide range of social ills,
- V. noting the existence of a considerable body of legislation and common law which relegates women and subordinates them to men under the pretext of invoking some form of religious basis or tradition (this is frequently the case with family codes in Islamic countries and among various ethnic groups and cultures in which women are given subhuman status: for example allowing women to be 'sold' by their father or a close relative); noting that the origin of many negations of women's rights and of inequality between men and women can be found in the transposition of religious rules such as the Sharia, considered to be of divine essence and origin, to the legal and political sphere; bearing in mind the wide influence of the Sharia, the application of which may affect all aspects of life, personal and family status, the choice of husband, minimum marriageable age, polygamy, repudiation, legal adoption, the right to initiate a divorce, child custody, the right to vote and stand for election, women's emancipation and recognised rights and the roles assigned to women,
- W. whereas many religious fundamentalists enslave women and generate family, social and state violence, persecution, exploitation, discrimination, physical and psychological punishment, leading even today to situations involving: crimes of honour, public stoning to death, genital mutilation, torture, rape, cruel and inhuman treatment, repudiation, abduction, forced marriage, temporary marriage and a ban on civil marriage, all with impunity for those perpetrating these criminal acts,
- X. recognising, nevertheless, the difference in attitude among many young, urban, university-educated Islamist women, who are transforming their own role in society and their scope for action, reconciling feminist attitudes with fundamentalist positions; appreciating the value which such attitudes may have from the point of view of Islamic legitimacy in the process of women's emancipation, or their role as agents of an Arab/Islamic modernisation which might be more readily accepted as home-grown, in contrast to modernisation seen as exogenous or tending towards cultural assimilation,
- Y. warning women in particular that fundamentalist influences may cancel all their rights and freedoms, subjugating women all their lives,
- Z. denouncing the serious and irreparable deficiencies in women's education and training brought about by fundamentalists; regretting that in many rural areas of the world girls are still being taken out of school at around 10 years of age and that differences in professional training are established to the detriment of women; declaring itself in favour of action to promote intercultural information and openness and to encourage training and mobility for women and women students by means of exchange programmes to complete their education abroad,
- AA. whereas it must be possible for women's identity to be personal and individual, separate from religions, traditions and cultures; whereas stereotypes, dress, values, ways of life and types of behaviour must be a matter of free personal choice,

- BB. regretting the use of religion or politics as a pillar of identity; deploring the influence of religious fundamentalisms on the construction of women's identity and recognising that laws grant identity by assigning people a system of living; stressing that women's situation involves the parallel affirmation of the right to personal autonomy vis-à-vis any other possible authority and that women's rights and social status are not a cultural matter but a matter of individual rights; noting that, throughout the world, marriages concluded from the age of 9 are, among other ills, the cause of identity crises for girls, adolescents and women and that the legal marriageable age should consequently be raised,
- CC. denouncing the extreme psychological and physical repression to which women have been subjected by the fundamentalist Taliban regime since it came to power in 1996, the obsessive control exercised by Islamists and other religious fundamentalisms over women's bodies, and the fact that they condemn women to illiteracy and situations of subordination and flagrant inequality, causing their skills to remain underdeveloped; condemning the unbelievable move backwards and the situation of apartheid and public criminal punishment suffered by over 11 m women in Afghanistan, who have been removed from all public areas, education, training and work, who have been plunged into extreme poverty and deprived of health care and who survive in a subhuman existence,
- DD. denouncing the use of cultural practices and traditions such as genital mutilation, as being violations, punishments and attacks on women's physical integrity and life; noting the application of this type of tradition and repressive legislation in the EU, and the existence of a legal vacuum in the majority of Member States with regard to this problem; recommending that the Member State governments concerned adopt the necessary measures to ban such practices,
1. Reaffirms that respect for, promotion and protection of human rights constitute the 'ethical acquis' of the European Union and are one of the cornerstones of European cooperation and of relations between the EU and its Member States and third countries; stresses that the rights of women laid down in the international treaties and conventions cannot be restricted or breached on the pretext of religious interpretations, cultural traditions or incompatible customs or law;
  2. Maintains that within the EU the defence of women's rights means that it is impossible to apply opposing or incompatible rules or traditions; repudiates the violation of human rights on the pretext of religious beliefs or cultural or customary practices; rejects the application in the EU of rules legalising inequalities between men and women;
  3. Insists that immigrant women are informed of the ban on discrimination and are enabled to benefit from services to uphold their rights; insists that they should be able to obtain advice from people belonging to the culture in question to the effect that they can cease to undergo a particular practice which impinges on their rights without therefore having to renounce the most significant aspects of that culture;

4. Urges the Member States and the Commission to provide the necessary means to ensure the implementation, within the EU and including at family level, of the Community legislation on the equal rights of men and women and the provisions on fundamental rights;
5. Stresses that the initiative in support of the adoption of a universal moratorium on executions and banning the death penalty from the world must constitute one of the priorities for the activities of the CFSP;
6. Will grant recognition, in the form which it considers appropriate, to those countries which end legally sanctioned discrimination against human beings;
7. Urges the Commission to draw up an information and training programme for women focusing on the influence of fundamentalisms, to include the questions of secularisation and modernisation of society and the family, and to draw up comparative data on the influence of fundamentalism on women in the Member States;
8. Recommends the pursuit of policies which curb fundamentalist influences, foster intercultural openness and exchanges, and offer women facilities as regards training, information and access to the new technologies, the promotion of multicultural, open and popular approaches in the sectors of fashion and design, and the creation and dissemination of publications, information brochures and radio and television programmes; also recommends encouragement and support for the activities of NGOs which promote and defend the rights of women and of women's research, education and training centres at regional and local level;
9. Urges the Council and Commission to acquire mechanisms for gathering information on fundamentalist attacks, violations and discrimination;
10. Proposes the adoption and implementation of a Community exchange and mobility programme for students and professionals undergoing training, intended specifically for women, as well as the creation of a women's open university; demands that structures and centres for intercultural meetings and exchanges of views such as the Euro-Arab University of Granada should therefore be used and developed, with the aim of establishing substantive communication in the fields of culture, language, religion, history and the contemporary structures of society;
11. Calls on the Commission to establish, both within the Community and in the context of its development cooperation policy, networks for collecting data on advances and improvements in women's rights, and to implement cooperation and association programmes aimed at the improvement and democratisation of legal systems, legal processes and penal establishments;

12. Calls on the Council and Commission to support, in the context of external relations and the development of policies under MEDA and Lomé, the activities of NGOs working to improve women's situation at ground level, especially those supporting women who are individual victims of fundamentalism;
13. Urges the Member States: a) expressly to authorise consulates to process visa applications on an individual and personal basis, even where a woman applicant's passport is the family passport; b) to issue individual residence permits for women; c) to give priority, as regards obtaining a work and residence permit within the EU, to women who have suffered a violation of their rights or are the victims of fundamentalist discrimination;
14. Condemns religious leaders who make use of belief-systems with the aim of excluding women or preaching their inferiority to men;
15. Recommends that the forthcoming directives on asylum procedures in EU countries should take account of the various forms of persecution suffered by women, especially those arising from fundamentalism, so that these forms of persecution are recognised and included in the definitions and rules on refugees which are to be drawn up within the European legal framework;
16. Supports the inclusion of fundamentalist persecution suffered by women as a social group and owing to their gender among the reasons considered to justify asylum applications and the granting of formal refugee status; calls on the Member State governments to recognise the persecution and violations of rights suffered by women for fundamentalist reasons as 'persecution for reasons of membership of a particular social group' within the meaning of the Geneva Convention so that these women (with priority for those already resident in the EU) can be granted formal refugee status; calls for legally binding guidelines or instructions to be established for the processing of such applications;
17. Urges the Commission to ensure that in negotiations for accession, cooperation or association agreements the Community 'acquis' in the field of women's rights is given priority over any other incompatible appeal to customary law, religious beliefs or cultural traditions;
18. Urges the Commission to open a political dialogue, in the context of the forthcoming agreements with the Iranian authorities, with the aim of improving women's situation, lending substance to progress and reform through their transposition into legislation and making provision for the holding of public and fair trials;
19. Urges the Council firmly to condemn the inhuman oppression and fundamentalist discrimination against women practised by the Afghan Taliban, as well as that persistently exercised against women and exported by the government of Saudi Arabia;

20. Supports the Fundamental Declaration of the Rights of the Afghan Woman, and proposes the creation of an international peace commission with representation of all parties;
21. Calls on the EU Member States to express their reservations in respect of governments which fail to guarantee equal rights for women;
22. Considers the separation of church and state to be the most acceptable form of government in a democratic society;
23. Rejects all religious fundamentalism, Christian, Jewish or Muslim, as being contrary to human dignity;
24. Calls on all religious leaders to promote equal rights for women, including the right to control their own bodies and the right to decide when to have families of their own;
25. Expresses support for the difficult situation of lesbians who suffer from fundamentalism, and calls on religious leaders, including the Romanian Patriarch and the Pope, to change their attitudes towards these women;
26. Calls on the EU Member States not to recognise countries in which women cannot acquire full citizenship or are excluded from government;
27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments of the Member States, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.