



Roma : MEPs doubt legality of returns

The legality of the French government's expulsion of Roma people has yet to be established, with regard both to EU law on free movement and temporary residence and to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the European Commission told Civil Liberties Committee MEPs in a debate on Thursday. The overall position of Roma people in Europe will be debated in plenary session on Tuesday 7 September in Strasbourg.

"When will the Commission be able to say yes or no, these actions are in conformity with European law?", asked Simon Busuttill (EPP, MT). "When we have all the facts", replied European Commission Director General for justice Françoise Le Bail.

Commission officials are currently examining evidence supplied by the French government to assess whether the returns comply with free movement law (Directive 2004/38) and with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which enshrines the principle of non-discrimination, which became binding when the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, said the European Commission representative.

"Risk of contagion"

"This is a European problem because the treaties have been breached", affirmed Rita Borsellino (S&D, IT), adding that "Citizens have been discriminated on ethnic grounds". She also warned that such measures could spread "by contagion" to other countries.

Jan Mulder (ALDE, NL) voiced doubts as to whether the procedures used to return Roma to frontiers had been carried out individually, as required by European law. "So far as I know, the French courts already have the reply", he declared.

"Is fixing expulsion quotas not unlawful?" asked Cornelia Ernst (GUE/NGL, DE). Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL, FR) criticized "expeditious police procedures" and "collective expulsions", and urged the Commission to consult civil society in its evaluation of the case.

Achieving "an unparalleled integration of Roma people"

"Parliament has several times called for an overall strategy to be put in place to integrate Roma people", noted Kinga Göncz (S&D, HU). "This sad and deplorable affair calls deeply into question Europe's founding freedoms and project", said Hélène Flautre (Greens/EFA, FR). She advocated acting on the lessons of these events in order to "achieve an unparalleled integration of Roma people" and urged the Commission to go beyond its current stance, which she described as that of an "honest broker".

Is European money for Roma people well spent by Member States?

The European Commission representative also judged it "important to ascertain that the 10 billion euro from the European Social Fund for including Roma people "is really spent in a way that benefits this community" by Member States in which it is numerically important.

"Some colleagues are reacting in a somewhat exaggerated fashion", observed Philip Claeys (NI, BE), adding that "we also need to see what public opinion thinks". As to legality, "there have been expulsions on the basis of individual processing of dossiers: the French government has acted quite legally, and has a perfect right to do so".

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