



Civil Liberties MEPs tackle human rights flaws in the European Union

Committees Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs [14-01-2014 - 10:47]

The European Commission must "immediately" set up a new system to monitor all EU member states' compliance with EU values and accession criteria, says a resolution voted by the Civil Liberties Committee on Monday. MEPs also criticise violations of the basic rights of migrants, national minorities, persons with disabilities and women.

The resolution, approved by 31 votes to 18 with 5 abstentions, analyses the respect for fundamental rights in the EU in 2012. "It is high time for the EU to put in place mechanisms to ensure the correct application of European values and the Copenhagen criteria, which should remain valid after entering the EU. A monitoring and sanctioning tool should be created to this end, involving EU institutions, member states and expert bodies like the Fundamental Rights Agency and the Council of Europe", commented rapporteur Louis Michel (ALDE, BE) after the vote.

Monitoring compliance with EU values

The European Commission should "immediately" set up a new system to monitor compliance with the EU accession criteria, commonly known as the "Copenhagen criteria", regularly and in an objective manner, says the text. This new "Copenhagen mechanism" would serve to set indicators, draw up binding recommendations and impose penalties such as freezing EU funding on countries that fail to comply. This should be done in an objective way, avoiding any double standards, it adds.

MEPs also suggest considering treaty changes, such as revising EU Treaty Article 7 (rules for determining whether there is a clear risk of a serious breach of EU values in a member state). The aim would be to separate clearly the "risk" and "violation" stages. To help prevent breaches of EU values in the long term, MEPs also call for the creation of a "Copenhagen Commission" of independent high-level experts on fundamental rights.

Assisting migrants in distress at sea

The Civil Liberties Committee calls on the EU and its member states to review any laws that could be used to punish people assisting migrants in distress at sea. Rescue efforts "should be welcomed and (...) never lead to any form of sanctions", it says. MEPs also express regret that even under the EU's new asylum system, children applying for international protection could be put in prison.

Freedom of religion and right to die in dignity

Secularism, defined as strict separation between political, non-confessional and religious authorities, as well as the impartiality of the State, "is the best means to ensure equality between religions and between believers and non-believers", the approved text says, calling on EU countries to protect freedom of religion or belief, including the freedom of those without a religion not to suffer discrimination.

The Civil Liberties Committee also calls for respect for dignity at the end of life, by ensuring that "decisions expressed in living wills are recognised and respected".

Rights of minorities and persons with disabilities

The resolution stresses the need to protect national minorities, regional linguistic groups and constitutional regions at EU level and set up a monitoring system modelled on the example of national Roma strategies. National minorities make up over 10% of the EU

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population, according to the approved text.

MEPs also urge national governments to invest more in policies to integrate persons with disabilities in society by removing all kinds of discrimination and restrictions on their rights to vote and stand for elections. Member states should also help them to live independently, adds the text.

Other issues

MEPs also call for an EU strategy to combat violence against women and gender discrimination, measures to safeguard privacy and personal data and proper rules to ensure media freedom and protect journalists. They also express concern about the disproportionate use of violence by police forces.

Next steps

The full Parliament is expected to vote on the resolution at the 24-27 February session in Strasbourg.

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