MEPs condemn racism and police violence in debate on George Floyd’s death

Racism has no place in the EU, said MEPs in a debate on police violence and discrimination following massive anti-racism protests in the US and across the EU.

On Wednesday 17 June MEPs debated racism, discrimination and police violence, often faced by minorities such as those of African descent, with Council and Commission representatives.

In late May, George Floyd, an African American, died while being arrested by police officers on the street in the US city of Minneapolis. His death, along with other such cases, has sparked both peaceful and violent protests against racism and police brutality in the US and around the globe the past few weeks.
At the opening of the plenary session, Parliament held a minute of silence for George Floyd before President David Sassoli gave the floor to a black MEP Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana (Greens/EFA, Germany). She gave an account of her own experience with police brutality in Belgium when she took photos of police officers during an incident with two young black people at Brussels’ North Station.

“I think we have to take a lot of measures to protect a lot of people who are not here and have not been able to escape police violence,” she said.

**Racism in Europe**

Acknowledging the existence of racism in Europe, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, “As a society, we need to confront reality.”

“We relentlessly need to fight racism and discrimination - visible discrimination, of course, but also more subtle - in the justice system and law enforcement, in our labour market and the housing market, in education and health care, in politics and migration,” she added.

Hermann Tertsch (ECR, Spain) said that in the current debate on racism, the focus has largely been the on the US, who are seen as the bad guys, even though racism and hate also exists in Europe.

Alice Kuhnke (Greens/EFA, Sweden) agreed: “We need to send a strong signal to the US but also to clean our own house. This Parliament and the Commission will define how the EU steps up to create a sustainable society that leaves no-one behind. There can be no room for racism and discrimination.”

Younous Omarjee (GUE/NGL, France) said “European history has always swung between barbarism and civilisation” with conquests, slavery, colonisation and the Holocaust. He called for measures to address both racial and social inequality in Europe.

Susanna Ceccardi (ID, Italy), however, said some of the recent protests had resulted in looting and damage to historical statues. “Apart from racism there’s another plague spreading across the world: that’s the plague of ignorance and the stupidity of those who want to erase their own history.”

Dacian Cioloș (Renew Europe, Romania) questioned whether the EU institutions themselves reflect the diversity of the European Union. “We must contribute to building an inclusive society, starting with being more inclusive ourselves. And when we set the example ourselves, then we can ask others to respect that principle,” he said.
Hope for the future

Isabel Wiseler-Lima (EPP, Luxembourg) said that George Floyd’s brutal death has led people across the world to stand up against racism and police brutality. “This multi-coloured movement has led to many young people having hope for the future.”

“It is our duty to eradicate the latent racism in our towns and cities,” Iratxe García Pérez (S&D, Spain) said, calling for the unblocking of the Directive on Anti-Discrimination in the Council to give the EU more legislative instruments to put an end to racism in Europe.
“Let me say loud and clear that we stand in solidarity with victims of racial discrimination across the world. Black lives do matter and systematic racism and discrimination have no place in our society,” said Nikolina Brnjac, representing the Croatian presidency of the Council.

Parliament urged the EU and the member states in March last year to take measures to tackle structural racism in Europe. MEPs demanded an end to racial profiling in criminal law and counter-terrorism as well as reparations for crimes against humanity during European colonialism.

Parliament condemned all forms of racism, hate and violence and called for action in a resolution adopted on 19 June.

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Procedure file