



Situation of Roma in Europe: MEPs quiz the Commission

A large number of MEPs gave their backing on Wednesday to the European Commission, which has announced that it may launch a procedure against France for failure to apply EU law on the free movement of persons. MEPs also sought to shed light on the situation in other Member States and on whether Paris has discriminated against the Roma.

MEPs were speaking at an extraordinary joint meeting of the EP Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs being held shortly after the Commission envisaged taking measures vis-à-vis France for failure to transpose EU law on freedom of movement.

Commissioners Viviane Reding, Cecilia Malmström and László Andor took part in the debate. The European Parliament was the first institution, in early September, to adopt a resolution calling on the Commission to look into possible infringements of EU law following the events of this summer.

"Zero tolerance" on transposition of EU law for all Member States

Livia Járóka (EPP, HU), Parliament's rapporteur on the inclusion of the Roma, welcomed the Commission's decision, saying "I hope this will put an end to the debate and send a clear message to all Member States to take action (...) it is not just a French problem but a problem of the right to housing for a whole community", she added.

Véronique Mathieu (EPP, FR) quizzed the Commissioner about the Commission's failure to react to cases of inadequate transposition of EU legislation on freedom of movement noted in the past in several Member States, even though the directive in question had been in force since 2006. Mrs Reding answered "We now have the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which gives it another dimension and we must apply zero tolerance to any failure to transpose the directive".

"The Commission mentioned other cases" than France, pointed out Timothy Kirkhope (ECR, UK). "Could we have a list?" he asked. The Commissioner said that her department was looking into "all cases of non-transposition of the directive" in other Member States but that would require "a case-by-case treatment and a solid legal basis before hauling [them] before the courts".

What about EU anti-discrimination law?

"I find the Commission's announcement ridiculous", said Sonia Alfano (ALDE, IT). It was displaying "disastrous weakness", she argued, and should speed up the infringement procedure against France. She added that "the Italian government has been doing for years what is being criticised here".

"Let's speak about France, where there has been a circular explicitly targeting the Roma. What are you doing about European anti-discrimination law?" asked Claude Moraes (S&D, UK). His concern was shared by Hélène Flautre (Greens/EFA, FR) and Rui Tavares (GUE/NGL, PT). Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL, FR) believed the deportations were continuing on the basis of administrative documents with priorities that were "completely mixed up", which themselves could constitute a violation of European law.

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"The case has not been filed away", said Mrs Reding, explaining that her department was continuing to study the matter and had requested further information from the French authorities. "I have made clear my deep disappointment about the circular of 5 August. It was amended on 13 September. What has happened since, and what is happening now?" she wondered, before adding "we must examine the copies of the deportation order so as understand clearly what has happened. We need figures, all the figures, before we can continue our analysis".

Social integration of the Rom and use of EU funds

"The structural funds can improve the situation of the Rom. The Commission has set up a Task Force on the Rom, which among other things will report on the way Community funds have been used until now. It will be available before the end of the year", said Commissioner László Andor.

"Mrs Reding said that European funds could have been used more effectively. Perhaps they weren't and perhaps we need stricter controls", said Salvatore Iacolino (EPP, IT). "Many Member States can do more" in this field, "starting with Bulgaria and Romania", he added. "Where are the funds that the people of Europe have paid for these people?" asked Mario Borghezio (EFD, IT).

The need to scrutinise the use of EU funding was a concern shared by Csaba Öry (EPP, HU), who felt that "the social integration of the Roma must focus on school, education and employment".

"What is striking is the commitment of the European Commission to the values of the EU, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights really does alter the picture", stressed Pervenche Bérès (S&D, FR), chair of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee. "We will be vigilant about the fight against poverty as part of the reform of the structural funds and in particular the European Social Fund (ESF). The EU2020 Strategy must also produce results".

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