

Berlin, 25 November 2020

Statement by Michael Roth, Minister of State for Europe, on behalf of the Council at the
November II Plenary Session of the European Parliament

President, Honourable Members,

Thank you for the invitation to this timely debate. I regret that I cannot be with you in person on the occasion of this plenary session, and I would like to thank President Sassoli for granting me this opportunity to address you in writing again. I will follow this debate attentively from Germany.

This topic is essential to so many of our citizens. LGBTIQ people all over Europe look to us. They expect and demand that we do all we can to ensure that their basic rights are protected. And they are right to do so.

All citizens of our Union are equal and should live freely, safely and without discrimination regardless of their sex, race, colour, religion or sexual orientation. These are principles and values solemnly enshrined in the EU Treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and EU legislation. They are not up for negotiation. Our common European commitment to decency, tolerance and equal treatment is the very foundation of the idea of the just society. This is a source of pride for Europeans. And for good reason.

In recent years, we have seen a welcome shift in favour of more strongly protecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. But we are still a long way from ensuring the full acceptance and inclusion that LGBTIQ people deserve. That is why we must continue along the road we have set out on. The EU, imperfect as it is, is still a beacon of hope for many across the globe. We must make sure that the example we set is a good one. The only way to do that is to build a society where our citizens are free to be who they are and to enjoy equal opportunities to participate fully and prosper in our society.

It is in this context that the Commission has presented its first-ever strategy in the field of LGBTIQ equality, as promised by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union address. I see this initiative as an important step in addressing the inequalities and challenges affecting so many LGBTIQ people in our Union.

The Council has already placed this important Strategy on the agenda of its Social Questions Working Party. At its 23 November meeting, delegations also heard from the Fundamental Rights Agency, which informed them about the situation on the ground and about the impact of Covid-19 on the LGBTIQ communities.

Discrimination against LGBTIQ people is still a reality in Europe, sad though it is to say. According to research by the Fundamental Rights Agency, as many as 43% of LGBTIQ persons feel discriminated against. Everyone in Europe has the right to equal treatment and it is our responsibility to make equality a reality. Which is why the Commission's initiative is so very timely.

The German Presidency attaches great importance to this subject. The need for more inclusiveness was highlighted at our recent conference on Intersectionality and LGBTI Policies in Europe.

The event focused on the lived realities of lesbian women and the acceptance of rainbow families in Europe. Sadly, equality in principle does not always mean equality in practice. For example, rainbow families, including married lesbian couples and children, can face difficult hurdles when seeking to exercise their right to freedom of movement within the EU.

With this conference, we also sought to cast light on the problems arising from multiple discrimination and for reasons of intersectionality - issues that can have a negative impact on, for example, the lives of older lesbian women and lesbian women with a migrant background. We must support women in all their diversity and make stigmatisation a thing of the past.

Honourable Members,

The advancement of equal treatment is a joint effort to which we all must contribute. We acknowledge and appreciate the European Parliament's particular focus on this issue, including the resolution in which you called for a strategy to foster equality for LGBTIQ persons.

The Commission's Strategy will show us the way ahead in the fight to end discrimination, to ensure safety and to protect the rights of rainbow families, as well as in our shared efforts to promote LGBTIQ equality in the wider world.

This is a new start and a new promise of greater equality to European citizens and families. Let us continue this work together, in order to address the needs and to improve the situation of the LGBTIQ community.

Thank you very much for your attention.
