News | 10.10.2013

Untouchables: stop discriminations based on castes!

Vote on the caste-based discrimination resolution by the DEVE Committee

The European Parliament adopted on Thursday 10 October a resolution on caste-based discrimination. Having regards to the resolution of 2007 on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India and the one of 2012 on caste discrimination in India, this is the third resolution dedicated to this subject by the European Parliament.

For a good reason! Affecting an estimated 260 million people worldwide, this form of caste-based discrimination breaches the most fundamental principles of international human rights law.

In 2006, the former Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, compared the treatment of low-caste Hindu "untouchables" to apartheid regime. Besides the use of this symbolic term it also describes a violent discriminatory system and humiliations.

In 2013, despite this striking statement of the PM, despite the abolition in its 1950 Indian Constitution -written by an Intouchable leader Dr Ambedkar- despite laws, millions of "broken man and woman" (meaning of the term Dalit in Marathi) are victims of atrocity with high rates of impunity. In India, between 2001 and 2005, three Dalit women were raped each day. A crime or an offense towards a Dalit happened every 18 minutes.

The Development committee chaired by Eva Joly wishes to seize upon this issue again. Besides being humanely unacceptable, breaching principles of international human rights law, caste-based discrimination leads also to high levels of poverty and inequalities.

This apartheid has dreadful socio-economic consequences. No access to lands, no access to decent labour, exclusion of the educational system and the health system are common standards, in addition to the denial of human rights and of access to the legal system by the police. Violence perpetrated against Dalit women is of utmost concern; they are victims about the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on caste, communities and gender. Only 10% of them have access to education. Dalit women are forced prostitution, and sexual abuse by members of dominant castes, some are forced to become a devadasi - "dedicated" to worship and service of a temple for the rest of her life.

Going out of this extreme poverty is simply impossible. The new status as emerging country of India does not prevail over this situation but worsen it. Inequality among Dalit and non-Dalit increases since the 90s,

which underlines the failure of development policies too weak on those issues.

This unfair, hierarchical system, deeply established within those societies must be eradicated immediately! Inhuman, humiliating, archaic, this system is also an impediment to the achievements of the millennium development goals.

For all these reasons, the European Parliament adopted this resolution to remind the EU what its obligations are and the diplomatic and trade tools it has at its disposal in order to put an end to this unbearable exclusion of millions of people. No aim to heap opprobrium on countries that put in place laws and policies on positive discrimination - which finally show a limited success. The final goal at European level is to recognise caste as a distinct form of discrimination rooted in the social and/or religious context. Once, people affected by caste-based discrimination are an identifiable group, it would become easier to consider them in EU development policies and programmes. Thus make the EU help more efficient.

Coherence between external policies and development policies imply for us first to assess effectively the impact of EU action (trade or investment agreements) on the situation of people affected by this form of discrimination but also to include a clause on caste-based discrimination. What happened recently in Bangladesh does not allow us, Europeans, to feign ignorance.

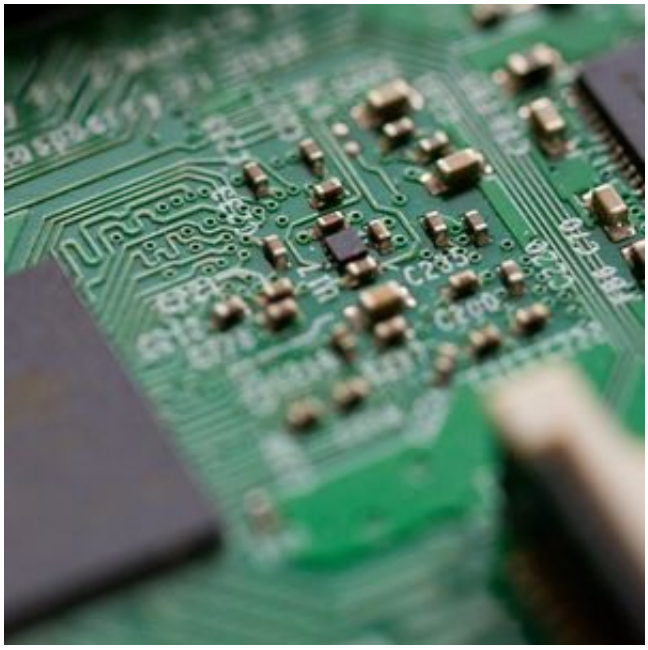
Political dialogues, trade negotiations, EU human rights policies, strategies and action plans, bilateral summit, international meetings, every opportunity should be taken and used by the EU to promote common initiatives aiming at eradicate caste-based discriminations.

From one discrimination to another. One should mention our own responsibility, our obligation to protect and assert discriminated population rights, often ostracized on European soil. First, Dalits' rights then the discrimination ignoring borders. But it is also the discrimination of Roma in EU Member States, victim of racism, prejudices, expelled from the economy, politics, education and health system. Yes, the European Union and third countries must commit themself to frank and constructive discussion to stop every forms of discriminations which are an impediment to development. However, Member States should also respect European laws and use in an effective way available EU tools to stop the vicious circle of racism, exclusion and poverty. Here and there. First for humanity and then for credibility issue.

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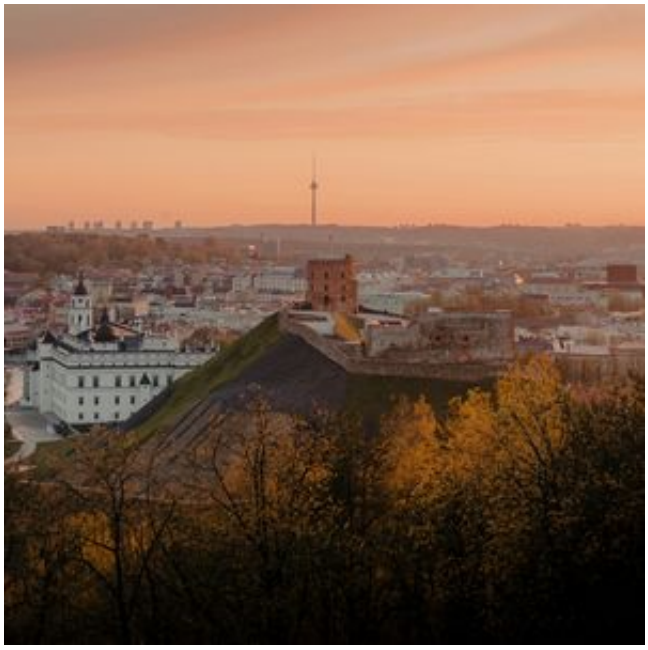
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