

The President

Ms Hilde Vautmans
by e-mail
Member of the European Parliament
WILLY BRANDT 06M107
Brussels

D 300135 14.01.2021

Dear Ms Vautmans,

Thank you for your letter dated 10 November 2020 in which you expressed concerns about incidents of hate speech by Members of the European Parliament, with the support of your fellow Vice-President, several Co-Presidents and other Members of the Intergroup on anti-racism and diversity.

As you know, since the beginning of the ninth legislative term, in my capacity of President of the European Parliament, I have always been committed to ensure, in the proceedings of our institution and in the conduct of Members within its premises, the use of appropriate language and behaviour which respects the dignity of the Parliament and its Members. In doing so, I have often reminded Members that the liveliness of parliamentary debates and the principle of freedom of speech, which is guaranteed for all Members of the European Parliament, cannot extend to tolerating the use of insulting, offensive or disrespectful language towards any other Member or individual within the institution.

With regard to the questions in your letter, however, I should draw your attention to the fact that it was in February 2019 when reference to “hate speech” was first included as an example of “offensive language” prohibited under Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure, alongside defamatory language and incitement to discrimination based on any ground referred to in Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Furthermore, such assessments as those you request are of a specific nature, which does not always lend itself to a quantitative evaluation.

Unfortunately, during the two terms, I can confirm that hate speech, including racist or xenophobic, sexist and homophobic language were reported. During the previous term, eight such incidents that concerned plenary were sanctioned, while during the current ninth legislative term, two incidents took place in plenary both of which led to sanctions. I would like to stress that, as President, I always take these matters very seriously and I make use of the necessary provisions in Parliament’s Rules which allow me to call Members to order and remind them of their obligations be it orally or in writing.

Moreover, pursuant to our Rules of Procedure, in instances where Members' misconduct occurs outside parliamentary meetings and the precincts of the institution, the powers conferred on me as President of the European Parliament to intervene are very limited. In these cases it would fall to the authorities of the relevant Member State to take any action which may be deemed appropriate under the national law.

I firmly believe that Members have a duty towards the citizens they represent to display exemplary behaviour in order to uphold the dignity and reputation of the European Parliament. To that end, you can count on my commitment to ensure that, when applicable, the relevant provisions of the Rules of Procedure are fully implemented.

Yours sincerely,



David Maria SASSOLI

Copy: Mr Peter Pollák, MEP; Ms Evin Incir, MEP; Mr Romeo Franz, MEP; Ms Samira Rafaela, MEP; Ms Malin Björk, MEP; Ms Salima Yenbou, MEP; Ms Anna Cavazzini, MEP; Ms Maite Pagazaurtunduma, MEP; Mr Łukasz Kohut, MEP; Ms Isabel Carvalhais, MEP; Ms Terry Reintke, MEP; Ms Karen Melchior, MEP; Ms Sirpa Pietikäinen, MEP; Mr Olivier Chastel, MEP; Ms Maria Walsh, MEP; Ms Abir Al-Sahlani, MEP; Ms Marisa Matias, MEP; Mr José Gusmão, MEP; Ms Kim van Sparrentak, MEP; Ms Anna Donáth, MEP; Ms Tanja Fajon, MEP; Ms Evelyn Regner, MEP; Ms Sylvie Guillaume, MEP; Mr Miguel Urbán Crespo, MEP; Ms Svenja Hahn, MEP; Ms Alexandra Geese, MEP; Mr Milan Brglez, MEP; Ms Alice Kuhnke, MEP.