



## European Network Against Racism

The voice of the anti-racist movement in Europe

### Open letter to:

- Matteo Renzi, Italian Prime Minister,
- Pietro Grasso, President of the Senate,
- Laura Boldrini, President of the Chamber of Deputies,
- Sandro Gozi, Under-Secretary of State for European Affairs,
- Gian Marco Centinaio, Andrea Cioffi, Mario Ferrara, Paolo Romani, Renato Schifani, Luigi Zanda and Karl Zeller, Presidents of groups in the Senate.

Brussels, 9 March 2015,

Honourable Prime Minister, President of the Senate, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Members of the Senate,

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our deep concern regarding the recent decision of an Italian Senate Committee not to sanction Roberto Calderoli, Italy's Deputy President of the Senate, for his 2013 statement describing former Italian Integration Minister Ms. Cecile Kyenge as an 'orang-utan'. M. Calderoli has remained in office and has defended his racist statements ever since. We urge you to authorise appropriate criminal procedures against M. Calderoli and to sanction racist and xenophobic rhetoric by politicians in the future.

Calderoli's statement – which was made outside of the exercise of his parliamentary functions – is a clear manifestation of Afrophobic hate speech, dehumanising Ms Kyenge in comparing her physical appearance to the one of an animal and inciting to racial hatred. This occurrence is not an isolated case, clearly indicating the lack of political will to recognise and to condemn Afrophobia and political hate speech. During the European Parliament election campaign in 2014, ENAR [documented cases of hate speech](#). Eight incidents were recorded in Italy, of which four were committed by politicians of Calderoli's Lega Nord. This development further underlines this alarming trend. The decision not to authorise prosecution is in breach of both Italian Legislative Decree n. 122 of 26 April 1993<sup>1</sup> and of the EU Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.<sup>2</sup>

This racist insult affects People of African descent in Italy and across Europe. As the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights already noted – including as regards to [Italy](#) - racially inflammatory political discourse has devastating effects on the groups targeted and encourage hostility, discrimination and violence against them. Politicians as opinion shapers have a significant impact on social cohesion. Hence, they have a special responsibility not to use a language that contributes to fuelling discrimination and dehumanising minorities. They must act responsibly and be held accountable for their statements.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 1 para. 1 (a): “Unless the fact constitute a more serious crime, and for the purpose of implementing the provisions of Article 4 of the Convention [ICERD], whoever disseminates ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, punishable in public, inciting to acts of discrimination directed against a group or a person or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin”.

The Italian Senate's decision not to allow prosecution following this incident gives an alarming signal for Italy and Europe and contributes to spreading impunity and normalising racism.

Therefore we ask that:

- The Senate's plenary overturns the Committee on Elections and Parliamentary Immunity's decision to reject M. Crimi's report of and allows prosecution of M. Calderoli in this case.
- Authorities take steps to establish an obligation to suppress public financing of organisations which promote racism, including public financing of political parties, as recommended in ECRI's General Policy recommendation N. 7. Such obligation already exists in the Netherlands and in Belgium.
- Both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies commit to revise their rules of procedures to ensure unpartisan and serious examination of cases of hate speech, in order to provide for internal sanctions and, where relevant, waive immunity and authorise criminal proceedings.
- A debate on hate speech, xenophobic and sexist comments – including online - and its consequences is held in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies.
- Political parties adopt effective self-regulatory measures in order to counter and sanction racist and xenophobic rhetoric by their elected members, as recommended by the Council of Europe Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)'s declaration on the use of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse.

We trust that we can start a constructive dialogue in order to address the issues highlighted in this letter, and we remain available to provide any support in this process.

We look forward to receiving your reply.

Sincerely yours,

The signatories:

1. European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
2. CIE Piemonte – Italy
3. Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti Civili (CILD) – Italy
4. A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe (CEJI)
5. Africa Centre Ireland – Ireland
6. African Empowerment Centre – Denmark
7. Apna Haq – UK
8. Associations de Juristes Arabo- Musulmans d'Europe (AJAME) – France
9. Associazione 21 luglio ONLUS – Italy
10. Associazione per gli studi giuridici sull'immigrazione (ASGI) – Italy
11. Centre Against Racism (CMR) – Sweden
12. Collectif Contre le Contrôle au faciès - France
13. Committee for Legal Rights for Foreigners (KUR) – Denmark
14. Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN) – France
15. Coordinamento Iniziative Popolari di Solidarietà Internazionale (CIPSI) - Italy
16. COSPE Onlus – Italy
17. Discrimination Law Association – UK

18. ENAR Ireland – Ireland
19. Estonian Human Rights Centre – Estonia
20. European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH) – Germany
21. Faith Matters – UK
22. Fight Racism Now – Sweden
23. Guatemalan Association of Lund – Svezia Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities – UK
24. Initiative Schwarze Menschen (ISD Bund) – Germany
25. John XXIII Peace Laboratory – Malta
26. JUST West Yorkshire – UK
27. KISA Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism – Cyprus
28. Latvian Human Rights Committee – Latvia
29. Les Indivisibles – France
30. Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights – Lithuania
31. Lunaria – Italy
32. New Urban Collective – The Netherlands
33. Northamptonshire Rights and Equality Councils – UK
34. Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities – UK
35. Naga Associazione Volontaria di Assistenza Socio - Sanitaria e per i Diritti di Cittadini Stranieri, Rom e Sinti - Italy
36. Overlegorgaan Caribische Nederlanders (OCAN) – The Netherlands
37. Pan-African Movement for Justice - Sweden
38. Plate-forme Migrants et Citoyenneté européenne (PMC) – France
39. Tell Mama – UK
40. UK Race and Europe Network (UKREN) – UK