

Council of State approves and criticises domestic violence bill

The report says the new law should protect all victims, regardless of gender

ROBERT KIMPLETON

The Spanish Council of State has approved the government's domestic violence bill and drafted an 80-page report in which it expresses its support for the bill. The same report also voices criticisms of some of the bill's provisions.

The domestic violence bill is designed to provide stricter punishment for those who commit crimes of domestic violence, create special courts for women victims and start a special fund for victims.

The Council's report recommends that victims of violence be recognised equally by the law regardless of gender, disagreeing with parts of the law that specify only women as victims.

Council member José Juís Manzanares commented, "The effective and adequate protection of women who are victims of domestic violence could require certain particular measures, but they should be non-specific in terms of gender, without any kind of discrimination".

The council recommended taking out a portion of the bill which referred to domestic violence victims as "those who are used as an instrument to uphold discrimination, inequality and situations where men have power over women".

The report says the new law should be worded in such a way so that women will benefit from its protection without any specific mention of gender.

The Council also calls for includ-



President of the Spanish Council of State Francisco Rubio Llorente / EFE

ing provisions that do not classify all domestic violence cases as criminal, "especially in the initial stages and in less severe cases".

The Council recommends that domestic violence legislation should also take into consideration secondary victims such as children or other family members who might be just as threatened as the woman who is the main victim.

The Council also said that the

new law as it is drafted runs the risk of criminalising some aspects of the law that should remain under the civil code.

The positive social role that the law could have was also mentioned in the report, which applauded its contribution towards "eradicating customs of behaviours that represent unjust or antisocial ways of thinking" and be pedagogical in the sense of letting the public know

what sorts of actions are inappropriate.

The mere existence of a bill for domestic violence, the report says, goes a long way towards opening up a societal debate with respect to domestic violence, but an "accelerated" legislative process which might prevent all sectors of the society from making comments about and contributions to its content should be avoided.

The report cautions against allowing a situation where some of the provisions of the law could lead to infringements of constitutional rights. As an example it referred to the part that would oblige those accused of aggression to leave their homes and not be allowed to return to them while the domestic violence case is active.

The report criticized the bill's going so far as to include as actionable "advertisements which present the body of women...so as to be degrading or in a way that shows stereotypical behaviour that is discriminatory", saying that such considerations are not relevant to a domestic violence bill.

"Such an extension of the legal concept of illegitimate advertising might promote dignity and women's rights, but it does not fall in line with the objective of fighting violence against women", it said. The report also recommended omitting the part of the law that would cause those who murder or injure women to be exempt from receiving a widow's pension.

Environment minister says Catalonia could adopt French proposals

ROBERT KIMPLETON

The minister of the environment Salvador Milà has taken a look at the environmental proposals that the French government would like to include in its legislation and thinks that Catalonia could include similar kinds of proposals in its Autonomous Statutes.

Milà explained that the statutes should include clauses dealing with "biological diversity because the progress of society is affected by certain consumer and manufacturing activities and by excessive exploitation of natural resources".

Speaking during the introduction of the Professional Society of Catalan Environmentalists, he went on to say that "the preservation of the environment should receive the same attention as other issues of

fundamental importance to the country".

He is also in favour of the inclusion of other clauses such as one saying that "everyone has a right to live in a healthy, balanced environment, and everyone has the right to take part in the preservation and improvement of the environment (and) contribute to the repair of harm caused to the environment".

In this way, Milà said, "these considerations should be reflected in the environmental policies of Catalonia in the new statute".

As for as Catalan environment policy in general, the minister considers it vital that a scheme of integrated planning should be set up that includes all of Catalonia "with an interconnection between different values."



Salvador Milà speaking at a recent press conference / ARCHIVE

KOREA

Talks with US expose differences

The United States and Korea are no closer to an agreement on the status of North Korea's nuclear programme after three days of talks between North and South Korea, the United States, Japan, Russia and China being held in Beijing. A note of discord was introduced into the talks when North Korean leaders mentioned that they were considering conducting tests of an atomic device. Nevertheless, none of the participants in the talk interpreted the North Koreans' comments as being a direct threat.

AFRICA

Congo, Rwanda discuss crisis

Talks were held in Nigeria Friday between the leaders of Congo and Rwanda to try to solve a crisis between the two countries which could spark a war. Rwanda has invaded Congo twice since 1996 and Congo has accused Rwanda of supporting rebel troops who would like to overthrow the country. The leaders of the two countries met after the United States and the UK pressured them to do so.

POPULATION

Spanish cities with high growth

Five Spanish cities are among ten in Europe that have had the highest population growth rates between 1996-2001, according to statistics released by Eurostat. The cities are Murcia, Logroño, Badajoz, Pamplona and Palma de Mallorca. The agency took data from 209 cities in each of the 25 countries of the European Union. Palma de Mallorca, Pamplona, and Badajoz were first, second and third respectively in the list, and Logroño was eighth and Murcia ninth. In other categories, Barcelona had the tenth largest population of elderly people. Eurostat also established a ranking for the ten European cities with the highest rates of unemployment in 2001, in which eight Polish cities had rates of 20% percent or higher.

USELECTIONS

Democrats assist registration

An organisation called Democrats Abroad Spain, affiliated with the US Democratic Party, will hold a voter registration assistance session on Tuesday 29 June in Barcelona. The precise location of the session has not been disclosed for security reasons. US nationals can find out more from the website www.dasspain.com.

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