

Equality Summit
Paris, 29-30 September 2008

Draft conclusions

The French presidency of the European Union, in partnership with the European Commission, held the Second Equality Summit with over 400 high-ranking delegates from member States and States participating in the Progress program including representatives from national authorities, persons heading independent equality organisations, national and European elected representatives, presidents of national and European non-governmental organisations, union and employer organisations and companies.

In the aftermath of 2007, the European Year of Equal Opportunities, which afforded an opportunity for continuing the drive to counter discrimination and promote equality, the Second Summit discussed the main issues to be found in the “Non-discrimination” section of the renewed Social Agenda adopted by the European Commission in July 2008.

Discussions resulted in a review of the main types of discrimination in education, employment, career prospects, vocational training and in access to goods and services. They also afforded an opportunity for analysing further upstream the role of some stakeholders whose role in anti-discrimination could be reinforced, such as equality organisations (most of which have been recently implemented), local stakeholders and ‘opinion-makers’. In addition, they provided a forum for discussing various tools available to us to change the situation in the field including legislative tools and subsequent developments, voluntary actions after legislation and recent advances in data collection better to appreciate discrimination phenomena.

The following main findings emerged from the discussions:

- **The Draft Directive**, adopted by the European Commission on 2 July 2008, with the intention of improving legal protection for victims of discrimination arising from their age, religion, disability or sexual orientation outside work, is a decisive step forward in consolidating European legislation in terms of equal treatment and anti-discrimination measures, irrespective of the cause and field. Although some highlighted loopholes and limitations in the draft legislation, the overriding message remained that adopting this statute would considerably strengthen the commitment of the European Union to promote equality and basic human rights in the core of its social model principles and values.
- The concrete implementation of the current legislative framework will be effective only if **all stakeholders** make an active commitment to appreciate and apply the rights and obligations imposed by the legislation. In addition to equality organisations and civil society which specialise in these issues, other, more generalist stakeholders must make a more salient commitment: social partners, local authorities and the media have a decisive role to play. One of the outcomes of the conference was the demonstration that local partnerships between government, civil society, labour partners and companies are necessary to act at a level as close as possible to our fellow citizens.
- The implementation of concrete tools and **support policy** in current legislation at European level is necessary. The European Commission communication in July identified fields of possible cooperation between member States. Some of them were discussed in detail at the Summit. Participants also hailed the creation of a European group of governmental experts which will offer a high-priority forum for national authorities to discuss and exchange best practice on para-legislative means to counter discrimination. It is, however, quite clear that exchanges between government authorities will be effective only if supported by national,

regional and local action by other stakeholders without which anti-discriminatory policy would remain theoretical. This applies to labour partners, companies, equality organisations and non-governmental organisations.

- Measures to counter discrimination must not remain a matter for specialists or militants, but must **become part of all public policy**. It is important for them to keep the attention of all stakeholders on a continuous and consistent basis both in developing policy (in analysing their impact) and in awareness actions implemented at European, national and local levels.
- The need better to take account of the issue of **multiple discrimination** was also emphasised. In legal terms, current European legislation does not have formal provisions in this field, which means that member States do not address multiple discrimination in their national legal systems. In court, the person concerned all too often has to ‘choose’ one aspect of his or her personality, one cause of discrimination, to obtain justice, whereas this is only part of the discrimination the victim has incurred. An exchange of best practice on this issue is therefore vital at European level.
- Managing diversity increasingly emerges as a strategic response for companies to adapt to an increasingly diverse society, clients, markets and workforce. The implementation of **unprompted charters** signed by companies or local authorities; the institution of labels identifying companies which have implemented best practice and the gradual extension of such instruments in European Union nations all represent a very positive trends which the authorities must support. These tools are one of the means for dealing with discrimination on the labour market when they are often still very noteworthy.
- **Labour partners**, as representatives of workers and employers, have a major role to play in countering discrimination on the labour market. Unions can inform workers of their rights in this field; can support victims of discrimination or help resolve conflicts. Employers have a clear responsibility in ensuring compliance with the principles of non-discrimination and can find in diversity a new source of energy for the company and express an interest in exchanging best practice. For these reasons, representatives of employees and employers must make an active commitment in measures to counter discrimination and must be supported in the private sector by the authorities.

In light of the above, the French presidency encourages European companies and their representatives in conjunction with the European Commission to take all initiatives which will promote diversity on the labour market in Europe and, where applicable, to develop a European Diversity Charter which takes account of the results of the study of European companies¹ conducted for the European Commission.

The French presidency also suggests using the future Group of Governmental Experts at European level to develop the two themes below in further detail:

- Means for combating multiple discrimination
- Integrating equality issues in public policy (“mainstreaming”)

The French presidency also hopes that the result of this work can add to the discussions at the next Equality Summit which will be held under the **Swedish presidency** in November 2009.

¹ Study entitled “Diversity Promotion and Development Actions in companies”. Results will be submitted at a conference held by the Commission in Brussels on 11-12 December 2008.