

Brussels, 30th January 1997



European Year against Racism is launched in The Hague

30 January 1997 -- The European Year Against Racism was officially launched today in The Hague at the Opening Conference of the Year in the presence of the Prime Minister of the Netherlands Wim Kok, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, the President of the European Parliament, José María Gil Robles Gil Delgado, and the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Pádraig Flynn. The launch of the Year marks a decisive step forward in the European response to racism. For the first time the Institutions of the European Union (EU) will engage in concrete action to combat racism. The stated aims of the Year are to highlight the threat posed by racism to human rights and EU cohesion; to encourage discussion of anti-racist measures; to disseminate and promote the exchange of information on good practice and effective anti-racist strategies; to publicise the benefits of integration policies; and to turn to good account the experiences of people who have suffered from racism, xenophobia or anti-semitism.

President Santer emphasised that racism is diametrically opposed to everything that Europe stands for in terms of protecting human dignity and promoting mutual respect and understanding. He stated that in its opinion on the Intergovernmental Conference the Commission called for the incorporation in the Treaty of provisions banning discrimination and condemning racism.

Commissioner Flynn said the European Year Against Racism has the potential to be a historic year: "This initiative is a landmark in the efforts of the European Union to combat racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism. It will enable us to highlight that one of the key objectives of the EU is to guarantee peace and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe. The objective of the Year is to promote a message of hope, to raise awareness of the problem of racism in our societies, but also to highlight positive ways of overcoming it. It also provides a very practical vehicle for the EU and the Member States to take action together and to stamp out the evil of racism in our societies," he said.

Commissioner Flynn emphasised the fact that the Member States have a key role to play in helping to define priorities and in planning and implementing action. Member States have drawn up workplans for the Year and National Co-ordination Committees have been established to act as key contact points. "The value of the European Year lies in its partnership and subsequent multiplying effect. We hope that it will work as a catalyst for change, mobilising individuals throughout Europe in the fight against racism," said the Commissioner.

Partners of the Year are broad ranging and include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media, decision-makers and politicians, trade unions and employers' organisations, chambers of commerce and trade associations, religious bodies and educational establishments.

The European Year will support a broad variety of activities, which range from local grass roots projects to regional initiatives, national campaigns and high profile events. Support to these projects and initiatives will take into consideration their Community added value and European dimension.

Events at European, national, regional and local levels will take place to develop the European Year's themes, and will include political, sports, artistic and literary events.

Examples of planned projects include a governmental working group to investigate racial violence; a *Youth Against Intolerance* fun-run and symposium in Belgium; a poster competition in Denmark; special training for Austrian judges on racism and hostility to foreigners; an anti-racist pop festival in the UK; and a European week of anti-racist cinema in France.

The Commission has invited a number of European celebrities from the world of business, politics and sport and the arts to act as ambassadors for the Year. So far Linford Christie and Joaquin Cortes have accepted.

The launch is part of a two day conference being hosted by the Netherlands under its Presidency of the European Union. The opening session will be addressed by Mr. Mario Soares, former President of Portugal. Workshops on the second day will examine the relationship between race and employment, the legal framework to combat racism, the role of the media and lastly to discuss everyday racism.

Opening Conference of European Year Against Racism

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BACKGROUND NOTE

A European Year Against Racism - Why?

1997 has been designated as the European Year Against Racism (EYAR) to highlight the fight against racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism.

This is in response to the continuing presence of racial prejudice, discrimination and racist attacks in all aspects of society, which present a constant problem to the European Union. Racism is diametrically opposed to everything that Europe stands for in terms of protecting human dignity and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

The prime responsibility for combating racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism lies with the Member States. However, there is clearly also added value in action at a European level.

The European Year marks the first time that concrete action has been undertaken by the European Union to combat racism in partnership with the Member States. By providing a European framework for action, the EYAR will create opportunities to jointly combat racism.

The Year forms a major element of the Commission's strategy to combat racism as outlined in its Communication on Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-semitism (December 1995)¹. It is designed to complement the ongoing work of the Council and the European Parliament in this area.

What Are The Year's Objectives?

The following objectives for the EYAR were set out in a Resolution of the Council on 23 July 1996² :

- * to highlight the threat posed by racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism to the respect for fundamental rights and to the economic and social cohesion of the Community;
- * to encourage reflection and discussion on measures required to combat racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism in Europe;
- * to promote the exchange of experience on good practice and effective strategies devised at local, national and European level to combat racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism;
- * to disseminate information on good practice and effective strategies among persons working to combat racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism to increase the effectiveness of their action in this area;

¹ COM (95) 653 final

² OJ C 237 (15 August 1996)

- * to make known the benefits of integration policies, implemented at national level, in particular in the fields of employment, education, training and accommodation;
- * to turn to good account whenever possible the experience of persons actually affected or likely to be affected by racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism, and promote their participation in society.

Who is involved in the European Year?

Racism can affect all members of society, be it directly or indirectly. In order to reach as many people as possible, action will be taken at different levels and based on the concept of communication, partnership and cooperation with certain key players. These will include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), decision-makers, trade associations, the media, trade unions, employers' organisations, local and regional authorities, MEPs, religious bodies and educational establishments.

The European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Pdraig Flynn, is responsible for the European Year and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs (DGV) is co-ordinating the Year at a European Level.

The specific budget for the European Year Against Racism is ECU 4.7 million. This budget is designed to stimulate wide-spread action and involvement on a national, regional and local level, so its success will depend on the willingness and ability of all players to contribute actively to the mobilisation of individual citizens and organisations across the European Union.

As a result, national committees have been set up in each Member State to co-ordinate action and events at local, regional and national level.

What Is Actually Happening?

The official European launch will be held at The Hague on 30-31 January 1997, at a conference jointly organised by the Dutch presidency and the Commission.

The Year will consist of a broad variety of projects divided into two main strands of activity:

- * **information and communication** - to include political events, sports and cultural events, and information and communication campaigns.
- * **exchange of experience** - to include local and regional projects, expert seminars and European-level conferences.

These activities will range from grass-root projects, to regional initiatives, national campaigns and high profile events organised at Community level, all under the heading of the European Year Against Racism.

Concrete examples of planned projects include governmental working groups to examine various aspects of racism, music festivals, writing competitions, production of childrens' books, videos and an anti-racist cinema festival.

How can people become involved?

The National Co-ordination Committees in each Member State will co-ordinate events at a national level. A limited number of local and regional projects, preferably with a transnational dimension will also be supported by the European Commission following a call for proposals in early 1997. This will set out deadlines, application procedures, priorities and levels of funding. In addition, organisations already involved in anti-racism work can highlight and promote ongoing work or models of good practice under the heading of the European Year. The official logo will be available from the National Coordination Committees for this purpose.

