



FACT SHEET 21

European Commission proposal for a European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007)

August 2005

Introduction

In June 2005 the European Commission put forward a proposal to designate 2007 as 'European Year of Equal Opportunities for All'. This follows on from similar initiatives such as the 2003 European Year of People with Disabilities and marks the tenth anniversary of the 1997 European Year against Racism. The initiative is a response by the Commission to the call for enhanced public awareness initiatives during its consultation on the *Green Paper on equality and non-discrimination in an enlarged EU*.¹ The designation of the 2007 Year is part of the overall Framework Strategy on non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all, which outlines the core activities currently planned by the Commission.

In the Communication the Commission acknowledges that 'despite progress achieved to date at EU level to eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunities, there remains much scope for further actions'; a reality that ENAR members are all too aware of.

ENAR, as a major outcome of 1997 European Year against Racism, is testament to the potential significance of initiatives such as the proposed 2007 Year of Equal Opportunities for All. This initiative will provide momentum in the fight against discrimination and has the potential to act as a catalyst for renewed European action against racism – action which is needed just as much now as it was ten years ago.

Focus of the 2007 Year

Activities during the 2007 Year will concern equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation and gender.

The **four core themes** of the European Year proposed by the Commission are:

- Rights – raising awareness of the right to equality and non-discrimination;

¹ See: <http://www.enar-eu.org/en/info/fact19.shtml>

- Representation – stimulating a debate on ways to increase the participation of under-represented groups in society;
- Recognition – celebrating and accommodating diversity;
- Respect and tolerance – promoting a more cohesive society.

Proposed implementation of the 2007 Year

The Commission proposal envisages a two-pronged strategy to the Year, with activities taking place at both the European and national levels.

The Commission intends to devolve much of the activity during the Year to ‘national coordination bodies’, who will develop ‘national policy plans’ in accordance with ‘operational guidelines’ developed by the Commission. In other words the Commission will make national bodies largely responsible for the implementation of the Year, however they must do so in accordance with common guidelines.

A Committee will be established at European level to assist the Commission in the implementation of the Year. The Committee will be composed of one representative from each Member State.

Actions during the Year may include:

- Meetings and events;
- Information campaigns and measures to disseminate the principle and values celebrated by the Year;
- Cooperation with corporate, broadcasting and media organisations;
- Surveys and studies.

The Year’s proposed budget of €13.6 million will cover preparatory actions in 2006 as well as the various activities taking place during 2007 itself. Actions at national level will be funded up to 50% from EU funds, and the designation of funds will be based on voting rights of the relevant Member State in the EU Council. In the case of European-level activities projects will be funded up to 80% through EU funds.

Decision-making process

The decision on the 2007 Year will be adopted by co-decision.² A working group has been established in the Council, and it will be considered by the Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs Committee in the European Parliament. Other Parliamentary Committees that will give opinions on the draft decision include: Employment and Social Affairs, Culture and Education, and Women’s Rights and Gender Equality.³

² Co-decision is the procedure now used for most EU law-making. In the co-decision procedure, Parliament does not merely give its opinion: it shares legislative power equally with the Council. If Council and Parliament cannot agree on a piece of proposed legislation, it is put before a conciliation committee, composed of equal numbers of Council and Parliament representatives. For further information on decision-making procedures in the European Union see: http://europa.eu.int/institutions/decision-making/index_en.htm

³ The Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee may also be consulted on the draft decision.

As the preparatory period for the Year begins in January 2006, is it likely that the decision will be completed before the end of 2005.

Lobbying possibilities

As the 2007 Year is a European initiative which will have direct impact on the work of national NGOs, it is important that it is structured in a way which adds as much value as possible to the work of those concerned with the fight against racism. Consequently action should be taken at both the European and national levels to influence the design and implementation of activities relating to the Year.

The proposal for a decision on the 2007 Year is currently on the agenda of the European institutions, and there is an immediate opportunity to influence the overall design of the Year. Over the course of the preparatory period, during 2006, the Commission will develop its common guidelines that will outline the detail of activities during 2007.

At national level, NGOs will be able to lobby Member States, through the responsible ministry, in order to influence the composition of the National Coordination Bodies, and thereby the implementation of the Year and how funds are allocated in the national context.

In particular anti-racism NGOs should seek to ensure that:

- Anti-racism is mainstreamed in all activities, and that black and minority ethnic groups are represented on both the National Coordination Bodies and the European Committee overseeing the implementation of the Year.
- Anti-racism initiatives are specifically designated, during the preparatory phase, for funding in the guidelines developed by the Commission.
- National Coordination Bodies are representative and operate as effective partnerships, and that nominations to the European Committee represent civil society.
- National governments provide match funding for minority ethnic led organisations that have secured 50% funding for national activities under the Year.

Key documents

- Ø Commission Communication on Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities for all – A Framework Strategy, COM(2005) 224 final,
http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/public/pubst_en.htm
- Ø Proposal for a Decision on the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) Towards a Just Society, COM(2005) 225 final,
http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/public/pubst_en.htm
- Ø GREEN PAPER - Equality and Non-Discrimination in an Enlarged European Union (June 2004),
http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/policy/aneval/green_en.htm

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ENAR is a network of some 600 European NGOs working to combat racism in all EU Member States. Its establishment was a major outcome of the 1997 European Year against Racism. ENAR is determined to fight racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nationals, and to link local/regional/national initiatives with European initiatives.



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