



Response of the European Network against Racism (ENAR)

Proposal for a decision on the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008)

November 2005

The European Network against Racism (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. Further information is available at: www.enar-eu.org

Introduction: Promoting a vision of an intercultural Europe

Promoting intercultural societies is a complex task which comprises of many elements, including: fighting discrimination, promoting inclusion, combating prejudice, providing responsive public services, and promoting a positive conception of the value of diversity in European societies. Consequently the proposal to designate 2008 as European Year of Intercultural Dialogue is an important opportunity to contribute to this vision.

In particular ENAR is committed to the elaboration of a concept of 'active European citizenship' that is inclusive of everyone living in the European Union as envisaged in the Commission's proposal, as part of an overall strategy to promote diversity. Consequently ENAR welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the proposal for 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. ENAR recognises this proposal as an important opportunity to develop approaches to intercultural dialogue that can make a real and lasting contribution to European societies where diversity is respected and welcomed.

ENAR makes the following preliminary comments in order to help ensure that this opportunity is exploited for maximum impact in promoting its vision of an intercultural Europe. The following are preliminary remarks and ENAR is happy to contribute further to the elaboration of the 2008 Year.

1. Inclusive definition of the targets of the Year

The target groups of the Year are everyone living in the European Union, as the paper acknowledges this includes European citizens and those living 'temporarily or permanently' in the European Union. For the purposes of the Year there is no distinction between these categories, consequently ENAR believes that it would be more inclusion, and within the spirit of the Year, to simply refer to 'everyone in the European Union'.

2. Consultation of with civil society

ENAR would raise questions regarding the decision of the Commission not to consult specific actors in the development of this proposal. In particular there are many NGO actors, including ENAR members, who could make a valuable contribution to the development of such an initiative. ENAR would stress the importance of ensuring that there is national level consultation with civil society actors in the elaboration of national implementation strategies for the Year.

3. Acknowledge the 2008 Year as one element of a broader anti-racism strategy

The proposal identifies the need to 'inspire people living in the Union to actively get in touch with other cultures... to *contribute* to tolerance and mutual respect'. While this approach has the potential to make a valuable contribution to a vision of an intercultural Europe, the implementation of the Year must actively recognise that this is one approach in a much broader strategy. Without active measures to combat racism, discrimination and prejudicial attitudes, initiatives to promote understanding of diversity will never be fully successful.

Consequently the design of national strategies to implement the 2008 Year, must take into account the long term nature of the project of intercultural dialogue, and promote

strategies which not only promote awareness but also tackle prejudice, while promoting equal opportunities.

4. Undertake a study to promote effective intercultural dialogue

ENAR believes that in order to promote sustainable and proactive approaches to intercultural dialogue the 2008 Year should be used as an opportunity to gather good practice and analysis on how to promote effective intercultural dialogue. ENAR welcomes the proposal that the “Year will contribute indirectly to the exchange of good practice and experiences between the sectors with regard to promoting intercultural dialogue”, however development of innovative good practice should be central to the elaboration of the Year. A study examining good practice could elaborate key principles for intercultural dialogue.

5. National focus in the implementation of the Year

Drawing on the proposal to establish 2007 as the European Year of Equal Opportunities ENAR would strongly urge the EU to adopt a similar implementation procedure for the 2008 Year. In particular ENAR believes that the elaboration of European guidelines, and detailed national action plans, in consultation with civil society would make a substantial contribution to achieving the objectives of the Year.

Experience from the 2003 European Year on Disability demonstrated the importance of effective national level implementation, a lesson which has informed the development of the 2007 Year. The proposal for the 2007 Year acknowledges the need to ‘decentralise the bulk of activities of the Year to the National level’¹.

ENAR would strongly urge the Commission to include representatives of civil society interests in the committee that will be established to assist it in the implementation of the Year.

6. Increase funding levels

In line with the European Parliament Report on the Proposal for a Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity, ENAR believes that the grants for actions on a Community scale should be increased from 80% to 90% co-funding, in order to facilitate optimum civil society participation. ENAR is also very concerned that the co-financing requirement at the national level is high as 50%, this will seriously undermine the participation of civil society and NGOs, particularly smaller ethnic minority led organisations.

7. Link to the 2007 Year for Equal Opportunities for All

Given the strong links between the objectives of the 2008 Year and the proposal to designate 2007 as the European Year for Equal Opportunities, as detailed above, equal opportunities are an essential pre-requisite to effective intercultural dialogue, ENAR believes that the Decision should include a reference to the 2007 Year. There is currently only one brief reference to the 2007 Year in the Explanatory Memorandum (page 4), and none at all in the proposed decision. Such a reference could be included in Article 10 of the proposal.

¹ Proposal on the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007), COM (2005) 225 final, Explanatory Memorandum, p. 5.

Conclusion

ENAR welcomes the proposal to designate 2008 as European Year of Intercultural Dialogue as part of the broader Union strategy to promote a vision of intercultural Europe. This initiative will contribute to the promotion of diversity, which in combination with measures to combat discrimination and racism, and promote equal opportunities, will contribute to more inclusive societies. However the success of initiative to promote intercultural dialogue are dependent on a wide range of factors. Consequently ENAR believes that it is essential that the Council and Parliament take the following recommendations into account:

1. Identify the target of the Year as everyone living in the European Union.
2. Consult civil society organisations in the design and implementation of the Year, in particular anti-racism NGOs.
3. Explicitly link the Year to anti-discrimination strategies at the national and European levels.
4. Conduct a study to highlight good practice in the promotion of intercultural dialogue.
5. Develop effective national implementation strategies.
6. Increasing co-funding levels to enable civil society participation in the implementation of the Year.
7. Develop effective synergies with the 2007 Year by making reference to it in Article 10 of the decision.