



Submission to the European Commission, Directorate General Education and Culture

‘Call for Ideas’ for promoting intercultural dialogue in Europe

October 2006

In August 2006 the European Commission launched a ‘call for ideas’ for the proposed European Year for Intercultural Dialogue 2008. The objective of the call was to obtain inputs from civil society the call sought to gain a sense of the ambitions and suggestions of interested parties as well as an opportunity for new ideas to be tested and for new partnerships to be built. This results will be taken into account during the process of finalising the call for projects for the Year to be published in 2007.

The call was facilitated through an online questionnaire which asked three specific questions relating to the ambition of the Year. This document contains ENAR’s response to each of the questions.

Question A

How can one contribute towards identifying, evaluating, developing and exchanging experience and good practice in intercultural dialogue on a European scale?

Members of ENAR have long been involved in intercultural dialogue. ENAR is concerned that the ‘added European value’ of this initiative rests in its capacity to enhance cooperation and good practice. The Year should provide an opportunity to promote principles of:

- **Inclusion:** Intercultural dialogue must be accessible to everyone in society, in particular those groups who are vulnerable to discrimination. It may be necessary to take positive measure steps to ensure that opportunities for dialogue reach everyone.
- **Participation:** Dialogue must be based on equal participation. Everyone must feel comfortable and able to engage in real discussion without fear of negative consequences. In particular intercultural dialogue must take into account existing power relations, and seek to create the conditions for real dialogue. It is essential that racism and experiences of discrimination are taken into account.
- **Openness:** All participants should approach a dialogue situation from the perspective of openness and listening. Without a commitment to hear the other voices in the dialogue views will not evolve. Without this openness vulnerable communities may feel unable to participate effectively.

Intercultural dialogue is a process that requires long-term commitment. The objectives of dialogue must be clear. It is insufficient to facilitate exchange without identifying this as part of a broader goal to foster equal societies.

In order to foster exchange based on the principles of inclusion, participation and openness, at the European level ENAR would propose that:

- The year should provide opportunities to share and experience good practice. For example through a ‘market place’ for intercultural dialogue in which participants can *experience* different models of dialogue and reflect on how these could be adapted to their national context.
- Promote mainstreaming across the EU policy agenda. In particular the EU should issue educational guidelines aimed at promoting the conditions for dialogue through diversity and anti-racism initiatives in schools.

Drawing on the experience of other European Years it is essential that the right balance is reached between European coordination and national flexibility. While it is essential that each implementing body can respond to their national situation, it is crucial that all initiatives respect the core principles, and that all civil society stakeholders have fair access to influencing the agenda.

Question B

What information and communication initiatives could contribute towards involving all European Union residents, and particularly young people, in the promotion of intercultural dialogue in day to day life and familiarising them with it?

Information and communication tools, and in particular the media, are crucial in the promotion of intercultural societies. The media can play a positive role in promoting intercultural dialogue, but also serves to undermine dialogue by stirring up xenophobic and racist sentiment. ENAR has been particularly concerned by recent media developments, not least in the context of discussions on the enlargement of the European Union.

Consequently ENAR believes that it is crucial that information and communication tools are used to address the perceptions of majority populations in Europe. While majority population express fear and distrust of diversity effective intercultural dialogue will not be possible.

In particular ENAR would encourage the 2008 Year to:

- Connect with the European Commissions 'For Diversity, Against Discrimination' campaign to promote public awareness. This initiative is particularly important as it raises awareness of the right to non-discrimination - an essential pre-requisite to inclusive and effective intercultural dialogue. The Year should draw on the positive experiences from the 'For Diversity' campaign, including its MTV initiative and the Journalist award.
- By explicitly referencing the right to anti-discrimination as a condition for intercultural dialogue, the 2007 European Year for Equal Opportunities for All has the potential to build awareness in the context of the 2008 Year. ENAR would propose a media initiative at the end of 2007 (such as an article or interview which could be disseminated across the EU media) highlighting the link between anti-discrimination and intercultural dialogue.
- Given the important focus on youth, the Year should strive to utilise those technologies which appeal directly to young people, and which are already facilitating new forms of dialogue. For instance social networking sites which facilitate not only written communication but rely heavily on music and images, could be a mechanism for encouraging cross border and cross community communication. The European Commission could explore partnerships with leading sites in Europe, such as www.bebo.com (focuses on schools) or www.myspace.com, during the 2008 Year. In particular mechanisms for crossing language barriers, or links between sites in Europe could be explored.

Question C

What specific European scale initiatives likely to reach, directly or indirectly, as many people in the European Union as possible - and particularly young people - could contribute towards promoting intercultural dialogue?

ENAR welcomes the emphasis of the European Year on promoting intercultural dialogue in everyday life, and in particular the focus on Youth. ENAR believes that it is crucial that the principles of intercultural dialogue are placed at the heart of European education policies, and would encourage the Commission to use the opportunity of the Year to mainstream dialogue in the context of the Education and Training 2010 Strategies, and the recent communication of equality and efficacy.

In particular:

- ENAR would propose to coordinate a project to train ENAR members to facilitate intercultural dialogue, this initiative could then be rolled out through the ENAR Coordinations across the EU Member States. Training would be based on good practice developed by ENAR members in the context of the Rotterdam and Berlin initiatives (in Rotterdam a training programme has already been developed). By ‘training trainers’ at a European level, the project would have a large potential for multiplication across Europe. ENAR would welcome a call for proposals which would facilitate practical exchange, and promote concrete initiatives for dialogue at the national and local levels.