



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from :	The Presidency
to :	COUNCIL (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs)
Subject :	Closing Conference of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All – 2007 (19-20 November 2007)

(Any other business item)

Delegations will find attached a note by the Portuguese Presidency on the outcome of the above-mentioned conference.

Closing Conference of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All – 2007
(19-20 November 2007)

In the context of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, and in a joint collaboration with the European Commission over 1000 participants celebrated the accomplishments of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All – 2007, in Lisbon on 19-20 November 2007. Participants in this event included Ministers, Members of the European Parliament, European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions, high level representatives of European and national civil society organisations, representatives from social partners and the business community as well as many distinguished experts and practitioners in the equal opportunities and anti-discrimination field.

The main goal of this conference was to draw conclusions on all the work that was accomplished, within the framework of the European Year, and to set out the goals for the future.

The speakers and participants in plenary sessions and workshops looked closely at the European and national activities during the Year and drew a number of conclusions with regard to the achievements of the European Year and the continuing work on anti-discrimination and equal opportunities in the European Union:

Achievements of the Year:

- over 430 national activities directly funded under the Year's budget;
- the numerous other activities morally supported in the context of the Year;
- the balanced treatment of grounds and the focus in many actions on multiple discrimination;
- the application of the principle of gender mainstreaming;
- the establishment of national strategies in many instances with a thorough analysis of the challenges at national level complemented by concrete commitments linked to the specific actions and future work;

- the dialogue initiated between public authorities at EU, national and other levels and civil society across the different grounds of discrimination as well as the internal dialogue between civil society organisations;
- the comprehensive commitment to the realisation of the Year by all actors including the National Implementation Bodies, the action leaders, civil society organisations at local, regional, national and European levels, social partners, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission;
- the comprehensive media campaign including the first ever non-political sponsoring of the Eurovision song contest, the Diversity Truck tour, the European Year web page and many other actions set out to raise awareness of rights, fights, stereotypes and underline the benefits of a diverse and inclusive society;
- the formal establishment and community co-funding of EU-level cooperation between independent Equality Bodies in the form of EQUINET;
- the announcement by the European Commission in its 2008 Legislative Work-programme to propose a Directive under Article 13 of the Treaty to address the current gap in EU anti-discrimination legislation (protection on the grounds of religion & belief, age, disability and sexual orientation is lower than that afforded in the case of discrimination based on race) and thus implement in a coherent manner the principle of equal treatment outside employment;

Bearing in mind that non-discrimination, equal opportunities and social cohesion are fundamental principles of the European Union, and drawing on this progress and dialogue, participants formulated the following key common elements of understanding regarding the future work on anti-discrimination and equal opportunities in the EU:

- While strongly underlining the need to protect the individual, the need for reliable data and statistics to measure the extent of discrimination, and the effectiveness of measures to fight it, across all grounds, is a prerequisite for further progress;

- Progress towards real equality beyond the removal of blatant discrimination requires positive measures such as equality audits, integrated work-plans, targeted training and business charters;
- The governance mechanisms established through the European Year at both national and European level should be sustained in order to follow up and develop the goals set and permit a regular exchange of best practice, including the establishment of an EU-level Committee on anti-discrimination which would consult regularly with civil society and prepare and follow-up the Annual Equality Summits;
- The importance of a continued EU awareness-raising aimed at increasing the knowledge of rights and responsibilities, fighting stereotypes, and promoting an inclusive society for all;
- Emphasizing the importance of immediate and full implementation of the existing legislative anti-discrimination framework under Article 13;
- A majority of participants urged the Commission to honour its commitment to make proposals to fill the legislative gap under Article 13 to remove any hierarchy of grounds and afford full protection under all Article 13 grounds of discrimination;
- Emphasizing the strong links between social exclusion, poverty and unequal opportunities, since poverty and exclusion are the most serious obstacles to equal opportunities. Anyone who does not have access to the most basic resources for participation in society, in the labour market and access to basic goods can not seize opportunities. This is highly detrimental to the cohesion of societies, and the need to tackle these issues must be addressed more coherently within the Lisbon strategy;
