European year against racism in 1997: implementation. Report

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PURPOSE : To present the 1998 Annual Report and the Report on the activities of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. CONTENT : The report is divided into two parts. the first part deals with the setting up of the Centre and its activities during the course of 1998. The second part gives an overview with regard to the situation on racism and xenophobia in the Union during 1998. The Centre was established in Vienna in June 1997 under Regulation 1035/97/CE. It is an independent organisation whose basic objective is to provide statistical and analytical information to the Member States on racism and xenophobia within the Union and highlight examples of good practice. It also sets up and co-ordinates RAXEN, the European Information Network on Racism and Xenophobia. The task of RAXEN is to collect and store data which will then be processed and analysed. A total of 262 organisations, composed mainly of non-governmental organisations and research establishments, were nominated. A major task of the Centre is to promote the creation of "Round Tables" at the national level in the Member States. Their objectives include the exchange of information and analysis of the situation and the causes, with specific regard to education and information, and media communication. It is apparent that a great deal of the Centre's time has gone into establishing structures and methodologies which will help fulfil its objectives. The second part of the report provides a general overview. It aims to provide information on the manifestations of racism, the social, political and economic studies being undertaken, and the action being taken by state or civil society to combat racism. The report also outlines cases of good practice in this regard. It highlights the need for a clear European policy on matters relating to immigration and asylum. Both punitive measures taken by public authorities and preventive measures are discussed. The contribution made by civil society towards fighting racism is seen as both positive and important. The mobilisation of NGOs, labour unions, and specialised institutions is seen as a sign of social health and effectiveness. The threat presented by overtly racist political parties is discussed. Education and public awareness-raising are seen as the primary ways of combating the popularity of these parties and the withdrawal of state funding for some of these parties is noted. A description of the activities undertaken by the European Commission in 1998 to combat racism is given.