

Establishing a European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia

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The Committee on Civil Liberties unanimously adopted the draft legislative resolution on the creation of a European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. The rapporteur, Mr Ford (PSE, UK) opened by stating that Parliament agreed with the broad outlines of the proposal in question, which responded to calls and recommendations in several resolutions adopted, the most recent of which dated back to 30 January 1997. He then set out the objectives and functions of the monitoring centre which, far from confining itself to coordinating the information activities of the competent national structures, also needed to exercise active control and conduct analyses in order to draw up conclusions and recommendations on good practices and tried and tested strategies which have marked developments in this sector. The rapporteur mentioned some of the priority areas of responsibility of the centre, including xenophobia relating to religious practices and, in very general terms, the preventive means and types of action needed. As far as cooperation with the Council of Europe was concerned, the draft report noted, *inter alia*, that duplication should be avoided and considered that the Union should focus as a matter of priority on the situation in the fifteen Member States. As for the structure, staff and costs, the rapporteur's appraisal coincided for the most part with the Commission's proposals. However, he expressly called for the management board of the centre to be chaired by the Commission representative and for a representative of Parliament (but not a member) to sit on the executive board on an equal footing with the Council of Europe and stressed that it was up to Parliament, as the branch of the budgetary authority, and not the management board, to give discharge to the director in accordance with the general procedure set out in Article 206 of the EC Treaty. While approving the small staff structure (25 agents) and the corresponding cost estimate, the rapporteur envisaged the possibility of concluding fixed-term contracts and recruiting staff on secondment from specialist bodies inside or outside the Union, in order to ensure that specific objectives were set and work was continuous and proactive. The draft report contains no comment on the legal basis for the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (Article 235) but does insist on transparency and for the budgetary authorities to have the means of control of the financial management.