Action against racism: action plan

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The Committee had a discussion with Beate WINKLER, Director of the Vienna-based European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. Ms Winkler said she was keen to support and maintain networks for combatting racism and xenophobia within the EU and emphasised the need to raise public awareness of the issue. MEPs then adopted a report by Arie OOSTLANDER (EPP, NL) on the Commission paper "An Action Plan against Racism". Action Plan against Racism - Turning to the Commission paper "An Action Plan Against Racism" the committee argues that the plan contains few specific proposals with corresponding objectives, time-scales or funding. It recommends that the Commission support political and educational initiatives to assist the acceptance of minority ethnic groups, including the Roma and Sinti, by the societies of Member States. It also calls for the removal of any obstacles to the performance of religious obligations that do not themselves infringe the rights of others (the approach it advocates is that of a "partnership", under which the Action Plan would bring together all concerned - citizens, national and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, social partners, the media and sporting bodies). MEPs also backed the "mainstreaming" approach proposed by the Commission, but believed it was essential for one Commissioner to have prime responsibility for anti-racism measures. They urged that primary and secondary pupils and young people be invited to take part in the Commission's main activities, particularly on TV, on the Internet site installed on its Europa server for European Year Against Racism, and via the proposed prize for innovative anti-racist projects. Lastly, the committee called on the Commission, when drawing up binding legal rules, to take steps to ensure that they could actually be used in practice by the persons affected; this would include assistance in making use of the opportunities afforded by the law (e.g. by creating independent official bodies to grant the persons affected legal and financial aid to assert their rights, or by creating or extending opportunities for claiming compensation through the civil courts).