Protection of minorities and anti-discrimination policies in an enlarged Europe

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This Green Paper sets out the European Commission's analysis of the progress that has been made over the last five years when the EU was granted new powers in the areas of discrimination on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disability and sexual orientation.

It seeks views about how the EU can continue and reinforce its efforts to combat discrimination and to promote equal treatment. In so doing, it responds to calls from the European Parliament and others to organise a public consultation on the future development of policy in this area.

The European Parliament and civil society organisations have played a pivotal role in advancing the EU's anti-discrimination agenda to date. National authorities have also been of crucial importance in defining and delivering this policy agenda. Other stakeholders include specialised bodies responsible for the promotion of equality in the Member States, regional and local authorities, employers, trade unions, experts and academics.

The Commission hopes that all of the relevant stakeholders will play an active role in the consultation exercise launched by this Green Paper. Given the importance of antidiscrimination policies for everyone living in the European Union, the Commission would also welcome reactions from members of the public.

Section 2 of this Green Paper takes stock of what the EU has done during the last five years to combat discrimination and to promote equal treatment. It looks at how these initiatives relate to other policy developments at European and international levels.

Section 3 examines new challenges that have emerged in recent years, including those linked to the enlargement of the EU. It assesses the implications of this changing context for policy development in the field of non-discrimination and equal treatment.

The collection of responses to the Green Paper was to be principally using an on-line questionnaire and was scheduled between 1 June 2004 and 31 August 2004.

The results of the consultation exercise will help to shape the European Commission's future policy strategy with regard to non-discrimination and equal treatment. They will feed into the reflections of the new Commission taking office in November 2004. They will be taken into account in the drafting of the EU's new Social Policy Agenda, which should be approved during 2005. The Commission will also take account of the outcome of this public consultation in reports that it is required to submit to the European Parliament and the Council during 2005 and 2006 on the implementation of the anti-discrimination Directives and Programme.