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

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This Commission communication on the non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all - A framework strategy follows on from the Green Paper on Equality and non-discrimination in an enlarged EU adopted by the European Commission on 28 May 2004. It sets out a forward-looking strategy to promote non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all in the EU. The Commission will present a communication dealing in more detail with gender equality in 2006.

The Commission will closely monitor the implementation of the framework strategy and the initiatives set out in this Communication. It will call on external expertise, where appropriate, in order to evaluate progress made and the impact of specific activities. In the interests of transparency, the Commission will organise regular meetings with key stakeholders, including national authorities, specialised equality bodies, civil society organisations and the social partners in order to seek their views and to encourage their active involvement in the promotion of non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all.

More specifically, the main actions in this communication are as follows:

- to ensure effective legal protection against discrimination :in addition to legislative transposition, further measures will continue to be required for some time in order to ensure that anti-discrimination legislation is effectively implemented and enforced across the EU. Priority areas for action include:

• targeted training and capacity-building actions for specialised equality bodies, judges, lawyers, NGOs and the social partners;

• networking and exchanges of experience between relevant stakeholders;

• awareness-raising and dissemination of information concerning the provisions of European and national anti-discrimination law;

In order to be effective, such measures will require concerted efforts by all of the relevant stakeholders at the European, national and regional levels. EU support will be made available, where appropriate, through the Community action programme to combat discrimination and, after 2007, through the PROGRESS programme;

- to assess the need for further action to complement the current legal framework:the Commission is not proposing to come forward at this stage with further legislative proposals based on Article 13 of the Treaty. However, it will undertake an in-depth study into the relevance and feasibility of possible new measures to complement the current legal framework. This study will examine national provisions, which go beyond the requirements of the EC Directives, in Member States and in some third countries. It will consider the relative merits of legislative and non-legislative measures. It will also produce a synthesis of cost/benefit analyses of different policy options carried out at the national level. The results of the study will be made available in autumn 2006. On the basis of this material, the Commission will assess the feasibility of possible new initiatives to complement the current legal framework;

- mainstreaming non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all : two types of actions are proposed : the development of tools to promote mainstreaming of non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all in relevant EU policies and the publication of biennial reports on the situation of people with disabilities (first report 2005);

- promoting and learning from innovation and good practice : the Commission will seek to promote exchanges of good practice, cooperation and networking between national authorities, specialised equality bodies, organisations working with victims of discrimination, and other stakeholders. The Commission intends to carry out an independent evaluation of the Community action programme to combat discrimination (2005) and publish a Handbook on the collection of data related to discrimination (2006);

- raising awareness and cooperating with stakeholders :the Commission is proposing to designate 2007 as European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. The European Year will help to raise awareness, focus political attention and mobilise key stakeholders. The Year will focus on four main priority objectives:

- Rights
- Recognition
- Representation
- Respect

This year will aim to: inform people of their rights to protection against discrimination under European and national law; celebrate diversity as an asset for the EU; and to promote equal opportunities for all in economic, social, political and cultural life. The Commission is convinced of the need to involve all of the relevant European and national-level stakeholders in order to ensure the effective implementation of the principle of non-discrimination across the EU. It proposes, therefore, to organise an annual, high level "Equality Summit" involving Ministers, heads of national Equality Bodies, Presidents of European-level NGOs, the European social partners and representatives of international organisations. This Equality Summit would take place for the first time in early 2007, to

coincide within the launch of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All;

- a special effort to tackle discrimination and social exclusion faced by disadvantaged ethnic minorities : one issue of particular concern is the situation of the Roma. The Commission has repeatedly highlighted the difficult conditions faced by Roma communities in Member States, candidate countries and acceding countries. In order to support policy development in this area, the Commission plans to establish a highlevel advisory group on social and labour market integration of disadvantaged ethnic minorities. This group shall meet for the first time in early 2006;

- enlargement, relations with third countries and international cooperation : the Commission will continue to promote non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all in the context of enlargement, as well as relations with third countries. Other actions aim to increase cooperation with international organisations, with a view to ensuring coherence, complementarity and a clear division of labour.