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European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
Commission européenne contre le racisme et l'intolérance

Seminar with national specialised bodies to combat racism and racial discrimination

“Communicating on racism and racial discrimination”

**26-27 February 2009
Strasbourg, AGORA – Room G03**

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Introduction

Over the past years great progress has been made both at the European and national level regarding the existence of comprehensive legislation for combating racism and racial discrimination. However, this positive development has so far had only a limited impact on the lives of those most vulnerable to racism and racial discrimination in society. This is due to a variety of reasons, but one of the most important is the relevant stakeholders' lack of awareness of existing standards in this field.

Efforts must therefore be intensified to make existing rights and obligations known and understood by all the relevant stakeholders, including victims of racism and racial discrimination, public authorities, civil society, the business sector and the general public. At the same time, stereotypes and deeply rooted prejudice based on fear and lack of knowledge must be effectively countered.

This is a very difficult and challenging task, which requires a sound knowledge of the issues at stake as well as skills in communication and partnership building. As outlined in its General Policy Recommendation No. 2¹, ECRI considers that national specialised bodies should play a key role here. In fact, in many Council of Europe member States, national specialised bodies are already successfully engaged in this type of activity. However, their often limited human and financial resources make it sometimes difficult for them to develop and implement more sophisticated strategies for communication and partnership building.

Aim of the Seminar

The aim of this seminar is to help national specialised bodies to further develop their strategies for communication and partnership building in order to enhance the impact of their action. To this end, issues that will be explored in more depth include how to reach the main stakeholders, how to identify their needs and how to develop and use different

¹ ECRI General Policy Recommendation No.2 on specialised bodies to combat racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance at national level.

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communication tools.

Participants

This seminar will bring together representatives of specialised bodies to combat racism and racial discrimination and representatives of general human rights institutions (Ombudsmen, Human Rights Commissioners, etc.). In addition, a selected number of communication and media experts have been invited to the seminar.

All attendees are invited to participate actively in discussions by commenting on presentations and providing examples from their own work environment.

Programme and structure of the Seminar

The seminar will take place over one and a half days. The first part of the seminar will focus on how to develop a comprehensive communication strategy. The second part of the seminar will concentrate on identifying all the relevant stakeholders in the fight against racism and racial discrimination and on developing strategies to win their trust and support for sustained action in this field.

The seminar will be split into the following six sessions:

Session 1: Setting the scene

Session 2: Communicating on racism and racial discrimination - developing a comprehensive communication strategy

Sessions 3 and 4: Communicating on racism and racial discrimination – key partners and strategies

Session 5: Communicating on racism and racial discrimination – working with the media

Closing Session

The following background notes are provided as a starting-point for constructive and stimulating discussions, without of course prejudging the outcome of the latter.

Session 1: Setting the scene

In the framework of its country monitoring work and its work on general themes, ECRI consistently draws attention to the importance of awareness-raising and partnership building for successfully combating racism and racial discrimination. National specialised bodies should play a key role here. In most Council of Europe member States one of the key functions of a national specialised body is to disseminate information about relevant legislation and discrimination in general, to raise awareness via campaigns or the media and to act as a network-building institution.

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ECRI has observed that national specialised bodies use a variety of means to disseminate information to the general public and to maintain contact with their key partners. These include the production of printed publications such as monographs, fact sheets, newsletters and information leaflets, the operation of a website and related internet tools, organising and participating in public events, organising consultation and network meetings, issuing press releases and organising press conferences, giving interviews, releasing television and radio spots and disseminating promotional material (posters, stickers, etc.). In terms of content, national specialised bodies usually make public their opinions, statements or comments on planned or existing legal and policy measures, possible remedies of redress for victims of racism and racial discrimination, the relevant case law including their own and/or that of other important decision-making bodies, their studies, training handbooks, codes of conducts and collections of good practices. In addition, many of them disseminate information designed to create a more positive climate and attitude towards those vulnerable to racism and racial discrimination.

Session 2: Communicating on racism and racial discrimination - developing a comprehensive communication strategy

The starting point for communicating effectively on racism and racial discrimination should always be a comprehensive communication strategy. Communication and partnership building may be expensive and time-consuming and most national specialised bodies only have limited resources at their disposal, which makes their efficient use all the more important.

Important steps in the development of a communication strategy include the definition of its objectives, the identification of key partners, the definition of key messages, the selection of strategies and its evaluation.

Each of these different steps requires thorough reflection. ECRI has invited to this seminar an experienced communication expert, who will make valuable suggestions on how to successfully implement the various steps in developing a comprehensive communication strategy. Special emphasis will also be placed on specific problems encountered in this context and on how these can be solved.

Questions:

What kind of information and communication activities does your institution carry out?

Which have been the most successful?

Does your institution have a formal communication strategy?

If yes, what are its objectives and its key messages?

What type of communication tools does your institution use?

What are, in your opinion, the main challenges in developing a comprehensive communication strategy?

When implementing specific measures, did you encounter any particular problems?

If yes, how did you solve them?

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Sessions 3 and 4: Communicating on racism and racial discrimination – key partners and strategies

The centrepiece of each communication strategy is to identify one's key partners and to select adequate strategies to ensure their commitment to a common cause and – if necessary – to change their attitudes. In this context it must be kept in mind that each of these potential key partners has its specific communication needs. Strategies to bring them on board will therefore vary.

For the purpose of this seminar, ECRI has selected six key stakeholders in the fight against racism and racial discrimination with which national specialised bodies could usefully maintain strong lines of communication.

Public institutions

National specialised bodies often maintain both formal and more informal contacts with various public institutions, including the parliament, individual ministries, the judiciary, law enforcement authorities and educational institutions.

Some national specialised bodies play a very important role in the political decision-making process. For example, through their active participation in the preparation of legislation, their statutory right to be consulted and to comment on draft legislation or by monitoring its implementation after adoption. More informal ways of influencing the work of public institutions include making requests to present views to parliamentary committees, sitting in on advisory committees, and maintaining personal contacts with representatives of the government and the administration. An effective tool in this respect is also the organisation of special training for judges, prosecutors and the police as well as for school teachers and other training staff.

There is no doubt that by providing high-quality advice to public institutions, national specialised bodies can considerably increase the impact of their action. Sometimes this may even lead to an increase in their resources.

Questions:

Does your organisation have close contacts with different public institutions?

If yes, with which ones do you cooperate most closely?

Are these contacts of a more formal or a more informal nature?

What measures have you adopted to ensure a regular flow of information?

What measures are, in your opinion, the most effective for building partnerships with public institutions?

Can you give concrete examples where an intervention of your institution had a positive influence on a specific law or policy initiative?

Civil society

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All national specialised bodies cooperate in one way or another with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Sometimes these contacts take place on a more ad hoc basis and sometimes national specialised bodies have created more permanent structures for cooperation with NGOs.

The first-hand knowledge that some NGOs possess is very valuable for national specialised bodies. The latter therefore regularly use NGOs' reports and studies, involve them in working and advisory groups or invite them to contribute to their awareness-raising campaigns. Finally, it should not be forgotten that NGOs can also be very important multipliers and contribute to making the work of national specialised bodies better known, for example, by directing victims of racism and racial discrimination to them, by publishing information on their work on their websites and by using their opinions and decisions to lobby their government.

Questions:

Does your institution cooperate and communicate with civil society actors on a regular basis?

If yes, what form does this cooperation take?

Are these contacts of a more formal or a more informal nature?

What measures have you adopted to ensure a regular flow of information with NGOs?

What measures are, in your opinion, the most effective for building partnerships with NGOs?

Business

The social and cultural map of Europe has considerably changed over the past years. The increased participation of various minority groups in the labour market provides the business sector with new sources of labour, but it also confronts them with new challenges. National specialised bodies can help the business sector to meet these new challenges and show them that there is also a business case for creating a work environment that values difference and operates in a fair and non-discriminatory way.

Therefore, national specialised bodies should seek contact with trade unions, employers' federations and private companies and to raise their awareness on discrimination and diversity. Some national specialised bodies are already very active in this field and promote equal opportunities and diversity in the labour market with activities specifically targeted at the business sector, including by preparing special information material, organising seminars and round tables, preparing codes of practices, organising joint awareness raising events and campaigns and awarding prizes for outstanding achievements in this field.

Questions:

Does your institution cooperate and communicate with the business sector on a regular basis?

If yes, what form does this cooperation take?

Are these contacts of a more formal or a more informal nature?

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What measures have you adopted to ensure a regular flow of information with the business sector?

What measures are, in your opinion, the most effective for building partnerships with the business sector?

Victims of racism and racial discrimination

One of the main tasks of a national specialised body is to inform victims of racism and racial discrimination of their rights and of their possible avenues of redress. They have to ensure that accurate and clear information is available to all victims (or potential victims) of discrimination, which also corresponds to their actual needs. Individuals and groups representing the interests of these victims should therefore be involved or consulted at the various stages of work of a national specialised body.

In this context also the accessibility of national specialised bodies is a major issue. For a victim of discrimination, who may often belong to a marginalised group in society, the mere step of seeking advice and reporting a discriminatory experience may be difficult. If the person has to overcome great obstacles to reach the anti-discrimination body, it is likely that the case will never be reported and registered. Issues to be addressed in this context include a national specialised body's physical accessibility, its image, the language skills possessed by its staff, and people's confidence that it will handle discrimination cases both promptly and professionally. Some national specialised bodies have therefore established local offices and free telephone lines or organised awareness-campaigns specifically targeted at victims of racism and racial discrimination.

Questions:

What are, in your opinion, the specific information needs of victims of discrimination?

What measures has your institution adopted to inform victims of discrimination of their rights and of their possible remedies of redress?

Is your institution, in your opinion, sufficiently known among victims of discrimination?

How do you ensure the accessibility of your institution?

In your opinion, which are the most effective measures for reaching out to victims of discrimination?

General public

The general public and its various components, including young people, are not necessarily aware of the urgent need to combat racism and racial discrimination in our societies. They should be aware of the fact that all people are entitled to equal treatment, irrespective of their race, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin or other ground. National specialised bodies should also concentrate on stimulating debate on ways to increase the participation of groups in society that are victims of discrimination and making the general public aware of the positive contribution each person, irrespective of his or her origin, can make to society as a whole.

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Many national specialised bodies have adopted a wide range of measures for this purpose, including visiting schools, organising public awareness raising events, disseminating printed and on-line publications (newsletter, fact sheets, leaflets etc.), operating a well designed and easily accessible website, releasing television and radio spots and disseminating promotional material (posters, stickers, etc.). Such activities are often also part of larger awareness-raising campaigns, which are sometimes carried out by national specialised bodies in cooperation with other relevant actors, including governmental authorities, educational institutions, the business sector, minority organisations and anti-racism NGOs.

Questions:

What measures has your institution adopted to raise awareness among the general public, including young people, about issues related to combating racism and racial discrimination?

Have you encountered any particular difficulties in this field?

Is your institution, in your opinion, sufficiently known among the general public?

Do you cooperate with other relevant actors in this field in the implementation of awareness-raising campaigns?

What measures are, in your opinion, the most effective for raising awareness among the general public?

Session 5: Communicating on racism and racial discrimination – working with the media

A special session at this seminar will be dedicated to discussing how to win over the media as partners in the fight against racism and racial discrimination. In January this year the Council of Europe launched a special Anti-Discrimination Campaign entitled "Speak out against Discrimination", with the following objectives: (1) to encourage the media to communicate information on discrimination and on anti-discrimination mechanisms to the general public and (potential) victims of discrimination; (2) to better prepare media professionals for working in a multicultural Europe and (3) to facilitate the access of professionals with a minority background to all sectors of the media industry. This Campaign will be presented to the participants of the seminar and they will be invited to make proposals about how they could also actively contribute to its implementation.

Another important issue to be addressed in this session will be how to place diversity and issues related to racism and racial discrimination in the media. National specialised bodies sometimes experience difficulties in getting their message across and convincing the media to pay attention to these issues. ECRI has therefore invited an experienced communication expert to this seminar, who will present strategies to win over the media as partners in the fight against racism and racial discrimination.

Questions:

Does your institution cooperate and communicate with media professionals on a regular basis?

If yes, what form does this cooperation take?

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What measures have you adopted to ensure a regular flow of information to the media?

What measures are, in your opinion, the most effective for placing diversity and issues related to racism and racial discrimination in the media?

Documentation

[ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 2 on specialised bodies to combat racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance at national level](#)

[ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination](#)

[ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education](#)

Fact Sheet on the Council of Europe Anti-Discrimination Campaign "Speak out against Discrimination"