



PUBLIC STATEMENT

Brussels, 13 March 2006

ENAR meets Austrian President and Minister of Justice to discuss racism in Europe

On 10 March 2006, a delegation from the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) held meetings with Austrian President Heinz Fischer and Minister of Justice Karin Gastinger. In light of the Austrian Presidency of the European Union the delegation sought to raise concerns regarding the situation of racism in Europe.

Specifically, the discussions covered the need to name racism in the Austrian Presidency conclusions, the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia, and the future Fundamental Rights Agency. Delegates referred to ENAR's Memorandum to the Austrian Presidency, which was issued early January 2006 (see: http://www.enar-eu.org/en/campaign/memo_austria2006_en.pdf).

ENAR's Chairperson Bashy Quraishy stressed the importance of a strong political statement from the Presidency which would act as a catalyst in enhancing protections against racism in the European Union. He therefore urged the Austrian Presidency to include a reference to racism in the Austrian Presidency Conclusions.

With regard to the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia, Minister for Justice Gastinger noted that there is a strong political will in the European Council to progress the Framework Decision, however there are a number of technical difficulties in the negotiations, in particular the question of freedom of speech. She noted that the Austrian Presidency will host a seminar on 20-22 June 2006 in Vienna in order to explore ways to advance the Framework Decision. ENAR will be invited to participate in the seminar.

Mr Bashy Quraishy welcomed the initiative, and emphasised the importance of the Austrian Presidency taking a leading role in these issues. The Framework Decision has already been substantially watered down, and it is important that Europe achieves a strong and effective instrument against racism.

Ms Pascale Charhon, Director of ENAR, raised concerns relating to the proposed extension of the mandate of the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) to make it a European Fundamental Rights Agency. She

stressed the importance of the independence of the Agency, and the need for the functional inclusion of civil society actors in the work of the Agency.

Finally, representatives from ENAR Austria (ENARA) raised a number of concerns relating to the national context, including the situation of the African and Roma communities in Austria. Delegates noted with concern a recent Islamophobic campaign by a Viennese politician. ENARA's representatives proposed that they meet with the President on a regular basis to discuss issues of concern in Austria.

The meetings took place prior to ENAR's 23rd Board Meeting in Vienna on 10-12 March 2006.

ENAR is a network of European NGOs working to combat racism in all EU member states. Its establishment was a major outcome of the 1997 European Year Against Racism. ENAR aims to fight racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nationals, and to link local/regional/national initiatives with European initiatives.

Members of the Delegation:

Mr Bashy Quraishy, Chair
Mr Tarafa Baghajati, Vice-Chair
Ms Clara Lopez De Letona, Vice-Chair
Ms Simone Wiegatz, Treasurer
Mr Yera Dembele, Bureau member for the Southern region
Ms Pascale Chahon, Director
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