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(Information)

COUNCIL

**Declaration by the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States,
meeting within the Council**

of 16 December 1997

on respecting diversity and combating racism and xenophobia

(98/C 1/01)

Europe, characterized by solidarity and a rich cultural mix, is founded on respect for diversity and on tolerance.

All Member States, with the support of the partners in civil, social, political and cultural life, are continuously striving to build and maintain a Europe based on democratic principles and on the diversity of its cultures and languages, a Europe where social justice is promoted and the rights of minorities are protected.

In today's Europe there are, however, still racist and xenophobic attitudes which contribute to the disruption of social cohesion in the Member States despite all the efforts being made to counter such phenomena.

These attitudes have their basis in cultural and socio-economic factors, but are exacerbated by a lack of recognition of diversity and of understanding of others.

Europe has to fight all forms of racism and xenophobia and take action in order to achieve the ideal of a Union founded on respect for other people and on tolerance. In this task, education must contribute to improving the ability to live together and cooperate with one's fellow human beings.

The Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council:

— WELCOME the European Commission's initiative in proclaiming 1997 'European Year against Racism'. They note that this initiative has prompted numerous

measures at every level of society, which have all helped to increase awareness of the wealth that lies in cultural diversity,

- STRESS that efforts deployed within the Member States must be intensified so that Europe's citizens, from earliest childhood, acquire greater understanding of and greater respect for other people. They consider that education in respect and tolerance forms an important part of the education of every young European,
- STRESS the importance of the role of education, which endeavours at all ages and at all levels of education to increase understanding and mutual respect among young people by helping them to come into contact with other cultures with an open mind and to approach diversity in a positive manner. School, which along with the family is the first place in which young people learn social skills, must be supported in its efforts to impart democratic values.

The Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, confirm the Resolution of 23 October 1995 and consider that it is of paramount importance to make the safeguarding of the values inherent in cultural diversity a fully integrated part of all education. Consequently they wish to join in the initiatives against racism taken by the United Nations by proclaiming 21 March each year a 'Festival of cultural differences' in educational establishments.