

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission: An action plan against racism'**

(98/C 407/29)

On 1 April 1998 the Commission decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned communication.

The Section for Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 16 July 1998. The rapporteur was Mr Koryfidis.

At its 357th plenary session of 9 and 10 September 1998 (meeting of 10 September), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 77 votes with two abstentions.

## 1. Preamble

1.1. The Economic and Social Committee notes with regret that, despite the declarations made and the relevant measures taken in recent times, racism in the European Union continues to be prominent. Moreover racism, as a form of specific individual or collective behaviour, appears to be of a more ideologically-inspired bent and at the same time usually has political overtones.

1.2. In the ESC's view this situation involves especially serious dangers for the future prospects of the EU and of Europe as a whole. These dangers, which threaten both the social and economic prospects of the EU and its very prospects of survival as an entity, must serve to bring about a new policy for tackling the problem — a policy of a new scope, form and quality — on the part of European citizens, the regional authorities, the Member States and the European Union's institutions and bodies.

1.3. The ESC takes the view that a political stance and political action of this kind are essential not least because racist attitudes and behaviour are in flagrant conflict with the anthropocentric dimension of European culture. They also conflict with the vision of European integration itself — the great post-war effort by all Europeans to abandon their internal quarrels and build a democratic, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Europe of cooperation and progress.

1.4. Because the ESC is concerned about the situation set out above, it calls upon every democratically-minded European citizen, every collective social body and every kind of legitimate authority to join the fight against racism. It also calls upon the EU bodies and in particular the Commission and the Monitoring Centre to take on the major task of central planning and coordination of the entire effort.

## 2. Introduction

2.1. In December 1995 the Commission published a communication on racism, xenophobia and anti-

semitism, together with a proposal for a Council decision 'designating 1997 as European Year against Racism' (1).

2.1.1. According to the Commission, one of the central aims of the communication was to present and develop the Commission's contribution to combating these problematic social phenomena, which had come to the fore since the mid-1980s. The communication also contained the relevant specific proposals which the Commission intended to put forward over the coming years, together with a draft Council decision to designate 1997 as European Year against Racism.

2.1.2. The Commission's framework for action against racism was determined by the following guiding principles:

- 'the struggle against racism requires the cooperation of all concerned'
- 'prevention must be the key aim of any strategy against racism'
- 'priorities must be established on the basis of cooperation'
- 'in developing its activities in this area, the Commission will scrupulously respect the principle of subsidiarity'.

2.1.3. The Commission proposal established the following, amongst others, as intermediate, medium-term aims for combating these phenomena:

- preventing racist behaviour and violence, together with monitoring and punishing racist crime
- creating the conditions for promoting the social integration of potential victims of racism
- promoting equal opportunities and reducing discrimination
- further intensifying international cooperation

(1) COM(95) 653 final, 13.12.1995.

— resolving the question of European-level legislation.

2.1.4. The Commission listed the following as available means of developing its contribution to the fight against racism:

- the European Social Fund
- existing instruments in the fields of education, training and youth
- various partnership projects involving non-governmental organizations and immigrants' associations
- a European monitoring centre to supply the Community and the Member States with objective, reliable information
- the proposal for a Council decision 'designating 1997 as European Year against Racism'.

2.2. The ESC's opinion<sup>(1)</sup> on the communication, which argued that it was essential to tackle these phenomena in order to achieve the objectives of the Treaty, made the following points, amongst others:

2.2.1. The Committee expressed its support for the Commission communication and for the proposal for a Council decision designating 1997 as European Year against Racism.

2.2.2. In support of the Commission communication, it emphasized, inter alia: its own historical and scientific view of the underlying reasons for the phenomenon, its scale and extent, as well as the conditions which militate for or against its development; the need for the Commission to define 'racism', 'xenophobia' and 'anti-semitism' on the basis of standard texts and the terminology of international bodies and institutions such as the UN, the International Labour Organization and the Council of Europe; the need to use the specific terms proposed by the ESC for the concepts of 'ethnic minority', 'immigrant' and 'migrant worker'.

2.2.3. The ESC placed particular emphasis on the role of education and the mass media as means of combating racism.

2.3. The present communication from the Commission, 'An action plan against racism', follows on from the 1995 communication. It presents a plan for action to combat the ever-present challenge of racism throughout the European Union, building on the achievements of the European Year against Racism and within the context of the new conditions which resulted, in

particular, in the anti-discrimination clause (Treaty of Amsterdam) and the establishment of a European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

2.3.1. Against this backdrop, the communication states that the action plan will bring together all those concerned and will foster the development of partnerships against racism in the European Union.

2.3.2. The action plan, which consists of four main strands, and takes a medium-term view, lays particular emphasis on the need for cooperation at all levels in promoting the value of a multi-faceted society in which many voices are heard, and on the creation of new models to be promoted and utilized throughout the European Union. The four areas for action are:

- paving the way for legislative initiatives
- mainstreaming the fight against racism
- developing and exchanging new models, and
- strengthening information and communication work.

### 3. General comments

3.1. Between January 1986, when the European Parliament adopted the first report of its Committee of Inquiry into the Rise of Fascism and Racism in Europe (the Evrigenis Report), and the present Commission communication, the EU's important struggle against racism has passed through many different stages. Some of the milestones along the way have been:

- the 1986 Joint Declaration against Racism and Xenophobia by the European Parliament, Council and Commission;
- the adoption of the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers in 1989 by 11 heads of state or government;
- the various resolutions adopted by the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions between 1990 and 1995, together with resolutions adopted by trade union organizations and the social partners (e.g. Florence, 1995);
- the establishment of the Consultative Commission on racism and xenophobia (Corfu summit, 24-25 June 1994);
- the relevant 1995 Commission communication, its proposal to declare 1997 as European Year against Racism, and the various actions taken during the course of the Year;

<sup>(1)</sup> See OJ C 204, 15.7.1996.

- the proposal to set up a European monitoring centre for racism and xenophobia<sup>(1)</sup>;
- the Treaty of Amsterdam and the general non-discrimination clause it contains;
- the present action plan against racism.

3.2. Despite these high points, the ESC does not consider the results so far of the fight against racism within the Community either to have been satisfactory or to have lived up to expectations.

3.3. In view of the above, the ESC welcomes the present communication and its intention to develop a new action plan to reorganize and support the forces combating racism.

3.4. It also agrees with the lines of action set out in the plan, the working method, preparations for legislative initiatives and the mainstreaming of the fight against racism, incorporating it into all policies.

3.4.1. Where incorporating the fight against racism into major Community policies is concerned, the ESC would focus in particular on employment, education and training policies, as well as on the information society and the mass media, and would therefore repeat its suggestions to the Commission concerning these subjects<sup>(2)</sup>.

3.4.2. The ESC also emphasizes that success in the efforts to achieve political involvement of potential victims of racism would lead to their more effective participation in decision-making, and hence to greater political solidarity with them. To that end, it calls upon the Commission to support initiatives of this kind at the local and regional levels.

3.5. The ESC considers the operation of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia to be a particularly important element in the fight against racism<sup>(3)</sup>, and consequently calls for its effective implementation to be speeded up.

3.5.1. Moreover, to ensure that this Monitoring Centre operates efficiently, the ESC calls for it to be linked with similar or other legally established centres in the Member States.

3.6. It is equally important in the ESC's view to have the most reliable information possible on how far European society acquiesces in or reacts against discrimination, and on the reasons for this. The ESC therefore insists on the most frequent and broadest possible research in this area.

3.7. The ESC believes that there should be a single strategy to tackle both the social causes and processes resulting in racist behaviour, and actual outbreaks of such behaviour. In any case, the Committee considers that the primary duty of European democratic states and societies is to recognize — or continue to recognize — racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism and, more generally, any discriminatory policy within the Community, as socially unacceptable. Consequently, the ESC unreservedly supports strong European anti-discrimination legislation.

3.8. The ESC also believes that because of open borders and globalization, the rationale and practice of discrimination cannot be effectively countered unilaterally, or within specific boundaries. The ESC therefore attaches particular importance to cooperation between the Commission and the appropriate international bodies, and with countries which have special experience in the field.

3.9. Lastly, the ESC considers that policies such as combating discrimination are relevant to productivity, competitiveness and growth, and have a medium- and long-term catalytic effect on them. The ESC therefore calls upon the appropriate Community bodies to provide the financial resources needed for substantial development of European anti-discrimination policy.

#### 4. Specific comments

4.1. The ESC agrees with the working method proposed by the Commission for drawing up the action plan against racism. It also endorses the further development of the partnership relations and networks developed during 1997. However, it regards the Commission's failure to include schools and education as partners in developing European policy against racism as a substantial omission.

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(96) 615 final.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cf. ESC opinion in OJ C 204, 15.7.1996.

<sup>(3)</sup> Cf. ESC opinion in OJ C 158, 26.5.1997.

4.1.1. Schools and education constitute for the ESC an area where a fully-fledged anti-racism policy can flourish and have substantial results. For this reason it calls on the Commission, in cooperation with the Member States and in the context of the new approach to the European dimension of education which is beginning to emerge, to incorporate its anti-racism educational policy into this.

4.1.2. In practice this means, *inter alia*, the Commission taking initiatives and developing specific activities in schools and educational institutions in general, and rewarding the best of them.

4.2. The ESC supports the non-discrimination clause (Article 13) of the Treaty of Amsterdam, regarding it as a significant step in the development of a European anti-racism policy. In parallel, the ESC wishes to participate substantially in the relevant dialogue which the Commission intends to open on this subject, and particularly on the method and scope of application of the non-discrimination clause.

4.3. The ESC agrees with the Commission proposal to incorporate the fight against racism into the main Community policies. Employment and education, the information society and the mass media, culture and sport, as well as the sectors of justice and internal affairs, research activities, external relations, etc., are all areas where racist behaviour can develop and where anti-racism policies can and must be formulated.

4.3.1. However, the ESC would particularly stress the need to understand the causes which lead to the appearance and development of racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism, and the need for in-depth research on these phenomena. To this end, the role of the Monitoring Centre will need to be developed and strengthened.

4.3.2. As the ESC regards combating racism as a responsibility not only for the Member States and the EU bodies but also for the governments of non-EU states, it would place particular emphasis on the Community's external relations and the way in which it conducts them. The ESC's view is that European legislation is right to deal rigorously with the views and actions of the governments of countries with underlying racist leanings or which fail to respect human rights and democratic principles. It therefore calls upon the Commission and the other EU bodies to continue to apply

the planned provisions to the letter, without hesitation, postponement or exception.

4.3.3. The ESC reiterates its proposal with regard to 'developing a European police training strategy for tackling discrimination and training for police in preventive and reactive policing to combat racist crimes'<sup>(1)</sup>. The ESC feels that it would be helpful for a special police body to be set up for this purpose.

4.3.4. In the ESC's view the sector most susceptible to discrimination is that of employment. The ESC therefore calls upon the Commission, in the context of the action programme in preparation, to give special weight to this problem, stressing the need for follow-up by the Monitoring Centre and for legal reinforcement of the right to work for every European citizen and every person legally entitled to work in the EU.

4.4. In the ESC's view the fight against racism will be judged by the extent to which racist attitudes and behaviour are socially unacceptable and generally condemned. To achieve such a situation it is not sufficient simply to take action as regards education and young people. What is needed is a constant, systematic effort to inform European citizens as to what racism is and where it leads. To this end the ESC regards a full, intelligent policy of information and communication, accepted by all citizens, as being just as important as action regarding education and young people.

4.4.1. Among other things, a communication policy which promotes positive messages about diversity or simple, intelligent, anti-racism messages would offer definite advantages. However, the ESC takes the view that there would also be definite benefits from a policy of publicizing specific serious and objectively proven racist incidents and/or good examples of positive behaviour. This could be achieved by e.g. including such incidents, and actions taken in response to them, in the relevant reports by the Commission.

4.5. For the ESC an important problem in developing an overall, comprehensive European anti-racism policy is the method of planning it and the range of Community administrative bodies participating in the planning and implementation stages.

In this context, the ESC takes the view that restricting the planning of the European anti-racism policy to a

<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. ESC opinion in OJ C 204, 15.7.1996.

single Directorate of the European Commission would impair that policy's forcefulness and acceptability. It therefore calls upon the Commission to reconsider its

position and carry out the planning and implementation of the definitive action plan against racism with the cooperation of all the relevant departments.

Brussels, 10 September 1998.

*The President  
of the Economic and Social Committee*

Tom JENKINS

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission concerning the social action programme 1998-2000'**

(98/C 407/30)

On 5 May 1998, the Commission decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned communication.

The Section for Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 16 July 1998. The rapporteur was Mr Meriano and the co-rapporteur was Ms Engelen-Kefer.

At its 357th plenary session (meeting of 9 September 1998) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 102 votes to four with seven abstentions.

**I. Broad outline of the communication**

1. The Commission's communication concerns the social action programme 1998-2000, which follows on from the previous programme (1995-1997), based on the green and white papers on social policy (1993 and 1994).

1.1. The document begins by briefly taking stock of initiatives taken so far (listed in annex 1 to the document) and analysing the social challenges generated by current developments (high unemployment, the pace of change, poverty and social exclusion and also the advent of EMU, demographic trends and the prospect of enlargement). The Commission then defines new targets for European social policy, taking account of relevant institutional innovations, introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam, which also incorporated the Agreement on Social Policy.

Against that backdrop, proposals for social action are developed under three main headings:

- Jobs, skills and mobility
- The changing world of work
- An inclusive society

1.2. As regards policy instruments, special emphasis is given to the importance of political, social and civil dialogue. Here the Commission intends to play a specific role in monitoring commonly agreed objectives, with particular regard to European employment strategy. It also announces forthcoming proposals for renewing social dialogue. The strategy will be applied through the Structural Funds and in particular the European Social Fund, for which the proposed reform places emphasis on supporting the modernization of education, training and employment systems. With regard to legislation, the Commission intends to hold periodic discussions with the European Parliament and the Council to follow up pending proposals, listed in annex 2 to the communication.

1.3. Under the first of the three key lines of action, the Commission intends to further the implementation of the employment strategy defined at the Amsterdam and Luxembourg summits, by means of annual assessments and possible recommendations to Member States. Measures will include the promotion of the exchange of best practice and innovation, paying specific attention to the problem of undeclared work and reserving the right to apply the incentive measures provided for in the Treaty of Amsterdam, once it is ratified.