

Background paper: “European Anti-Racism Summit”

(19 March 2021)

“We need to talk about racism. And we need to act. It is always possible to change direction if there is a will to do so. I am glad to live in a society that condemns racism. But we should not stop there. The motto of our European Union is: ‘United in diversity’. Our task is to live up to these words, and to fulfil their meaning”

President von der Leyen, European Parliament, 17 June 2020

On 18 September 2020, the European Commission adopted an ambitious [EU anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025](#) (hereinafter “the Action plan”) that sets out a series of measures to tackle racism and racial discrimination covering a comprehensive range of policy areas.

As part of its implementation, the European Commission, together with the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union and with the support of the Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup of the European Parliament, **the European Anti-Racism Summit** on 19 March 2021. This High-Level event will gather representatives of the EU institutions, Member States, equality bodies, civil society and international organisations and numerous key stakeholders to send a strong signal against racism at the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Summit intends to lay the groundwork for future cooperation on developing concrete conditions for implementation of the EU anti-racism agenda.

All too often, racial or ethnic origin is used as a ground to discriminate – the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of terrorist attacks are just the most recent cases where blame has been unjustly directed at people with a minority racial or ethnic background. People of Asian and African descent, Muslims, Jewish and Roma people have all suffered from intolerance. Against the backdrop of the Action Plan, the Commission has developed the EU Roma Strategic Framework and is developing the forthcoming Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life to tackle the specific forms of discrimination these groups face.

As stated in the Action Plan, policy-makers in EU institutions and Member States need to engage with and learn from people experiencing everyday racism and also address structural racism. The Commission therefore prioritises listening to those affected and will implement and monitor this Action plan with the involvement of people experiencing racism and discrimination. There are different forms of racism, for instance, anti-black racism, antigypsyism, antisemitism and anti-Asian racism, that link to religion or belief in cases such as anti-Muslim hatred. All share the reality that the value of a person is undermined by stereotypes based on prejudice. In addition to religion or belief, racism can also be combined

with discrimination and hatred on other grounds, including sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, and disability or against migrants. This needs to be taken into account through an intersectional approach. Consequently, the Summit will be introduced by several testimonies of representatives of civil society and activists who will share their stories and identify what are the most urgent actions to be taken on different levels – local, regional and national as well as European.

Furthermore, the Summit will include two High-level Panel discussions on “*The European Anti-Racism Action Plan – from words to action*” and “*Tackling racism and racial discrimination through legislation*”.

This document provides for background information and expectations from the discussions that will take place during the first European Anti-Racism Summit.

Scope and objectives

The primary objective of the Summit is to engage all relevant stakeholders in discussing and setting priorities on how to eradicate racism in all its forms in the European Union, prompting strong commitments in particular by the representatives of the Member States and of EU institutions on the implementation of the Action plan and the EU anti-racism agenda in general. The fight against racism shall continue and be intensified as a common front, through strong EU partnerships and co-operation, also involving civil society, social partners, grassroots organisations, research bodies, and others, while respecting each other’s roles and competences.

Engaging with people experiencing everyday racism and racial discrimination: “nothing about us without us”

This inaugural session will gather “reality bites” of persons with a racial or ethnic minority background, representing different communities affected by racism and discrimination. The Commission invites all relevant actors and stakeholders to engage in an open, honest and continuous dialogue to help inform the further development and implementation of policies to counter racism. As part of this dialogue, the EU institutions and Member States need to bring a fresh approach to how they engage with civil society and ensure that the voices of people with a racial or ethnic minority background are heard. These dialogues will not only cover the targeted measures announced in this Action plan, but will also be central to the work of mainstreaming the perspectives of people with a racial or ethnic minority background into all EU policies.

Consequently, the Summit aims to foster a strong cooperation with civil society and grassroots organisations, in particular belonging to ethnic and racial minorities, who have first-hand expertise and experience for defining the right way forward. Paying particular attention to the intersectional approach, the Summit will provide for an occasion to identify

concrete steps in setting up a regular consultation process with the civil society organisations active in the fight against racism at European, national and local levels.

Guiding questions for the discussion:

- What can the Commission do, practically, to create a space for dialogue with civil society organisations working on anti-racism?
- What should national authorities have in place to foster consultation and participation of civil society and communities in anti-racism policies?
- How should representativeness of the different forms of racial discrimination be ensured?

The European Action Plan against Racism – From words to action

The Action plan acknowledges that racism comes in different forms. The Action plan looks at racism, not only when it manifests as individual episodes of hate crime or discrimination but also in its structural forms. Racism can indeed be embedded in social, financial and political institutions, impacting on the levers of power and on policy-making¹. This *structural racism* perpetuates the barriers placed in the way of citizens solely due to their racial or ethnic origin. Every day, people affected by racism can feel its impact on their access to jobs, healthcare, housing, financing or education, as well as cases of violence².

Discussions will therefore focus on the causes and forms of structural racism in the European Union as well as effective solutions. For example, in order to **tackle structural racism**, the Anti-Racism Action Plan calls upon all national governments to develop and adopt national anti-racism action plans by the end of 2022. Other measures proposed by the Action Plan include for instance addressing racial and ethnic stereotypes in cooperation with the media, engagement in remembrance activities, as an important part of encouraging inclusion and common understanding or ensuring a consistent approach on equality data collection, in particular as regards data disaggregated by racial or ethnic origin.

Tackling racism and racial discrimination through legislation

¹ Communication from the Commission, "[A Union of Equality: EU anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025](#)", 18 September 2020, Com(2020) 565, pp.1-2

² *Ibidem*, p.2

In 2020, the European Commission marked the 20th anniversary of the Racial Equality Directive (Directive 2000/43/EC)³. This Directive set an extensive framework to fight racial and ethnic discrimination and has considerably advanced equality in Europe. Its adoption has led to important national legislative changes.

Additional relevant instruments include the 2008 Council Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia⁴, the Victims' Rights Directive⁵ or other policy initiatives such as the voluntary commitments under the EU Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online.

Discussions in this panel is two pronged with a focus on:

1. The existing legislation in combating racial discrimination as well as on the effective enforcement of the European legal framework aiming to ensure that individual rights and obligations are respected in practice; and
2. The exploration of future legislation augmenting the powers of equality bodies to affirm the right to anti-discrimination and possible legislation in the area of law enforcement.

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³ The Racial Equality Directive prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in the areas of employment and occupation, education, vocational training, social protection including healthcare, social advantage, and access to and supply of goods and services available to the public, including housing.

⁴ [COUNCIL FRAMEWORK DECISION 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law](#), 28 November 2008, 4 p.

⁵ [DIRECTIVE 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime](#), 25 October 2012, 17 p.