



CEMR's Position paper on Green Paper on Equality and non-discrimination

RESPONSE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S GREEN PAPER ON EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION IN AN ENLARGED EUROPEAN UNION

INTRODUCTION

CEMR is firmly committed to the promotion of equal opportunities and thus welcomes the opportunity to give its opinion on the European Commission's Green Paper on Equality and non-discrimination in an enlarged European Union.

Our organisation, currently Chaired by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, unites 46 national associations of local and regional government in 33 European countries. Equality between men and women, in particular in local political life, represents one of CEMR's main fields of activity. In 1983, CEMR organised the first European conference of women local and regional elected representatives (with the support of the European Commission) and after several similar initiatives, it was decided, in 1991, to set up a standing Committee of European women elected representatives of local and regional authorities. Currently chaired by Vicenta Bosch Palanca, Mayor of Bonrepós i Mirambel (Spain), this Committee draws together women elected representatives of local and regional authorities from all over Europe and has always actively taken part in the implementation of community policies. In 2003 CEMR launched, in the framework of the fifth community action programme for equality, a project (currently underway) to construct the "Virtual Town For Equality".

Furthermore, and more broadly speaking, CEMR advocates equivalent levels of protection across all groups - i.e. in terms of gender, age, ethnicity - covered by the EU anti-discrimination clause as the current piecemeal approach, approaching a "hierarchy" between different groups, creates uncertainty and resentment.

It is in this context that CEMR welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the future of European policy in favour of equality and to outline its position on this subject.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR POLICIES TO FIGHT AGAINST DISCRIMINATION AND IN PARTICULAR FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam encompasses all aspects of discrimination, based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

It is clear that equality between men and women has been a subject of a separate EU policy for several years. This policy has enabled a great deal of progress in the field of equality between men and women, even if the discrimination between genders, in different sectors, has not yet disappeared.

In Article 1-2 of the European Constitutional Treaty adopted in Brussels on June 28th, 2004, non-discrimination and equality between men and women are stated as fundamental values of the EU.

CEMR highlights this distinction and calls on the European Commission to safeguard a specific policy in favour of equality between men and women. Non-discrimination based on gender is in fact a horizontal factor in relation to other forms of discrimination, and is often a source of double discrimination.

The fight against discrimination between men and women must therefore be separate and have necessary resources for independent actions.

In respect of other areas of equality legislation such as those covering age, disability, and racial or ethnic origin, CEMR calls for a better implementation of existing legislation in all EU Member States and advocate the right of local and regional authorities to be consulted on future EU legislation in this field.

THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The enlarged European Union must consider policies to fight against discrimination as one of its main priorities. This attitude must not change while our continent continues to be a place for discrimination between citizens due to their gender, race, religion, etc. The disparity of treatment between women and men represents one of the principal forms of discrimination in our society, and is often at the origin of a difficult social situation.

We call on the EU to continue its work to resolve this problem, and in particular to make sure that the new member states overcome the delay, which exists in this field. In this context, we call on the European Commission to provide the necessary financial resources for effective action so that equality is not merely an objective, but a reality of the European social model. Equality between men and women represents a horizontal and common link to all forms of discrimination. CEMR calls on the European Commission to maintain specific policies to fight against this discrimination in all sectors, and to provide a separate budget.

CEMR pays particular attention to the theme of women's participation in the decision making process, in particular in the political arena. In this framework, we draw the European Institutions' attention to the continued imbalance which exists within the decision making process (at all levels and in all fields of activity) between the presence of men and women. Despite the noted progress over the last few years, equality in this field is still far from a reality and remains a theoretical recommendation. For this reason, we ask the European Commission to ensure that the balance between men and women in the decision making process is a priority with a specific policy of the EU institutions.

CEMR also stress the importance of non-legislative actions, such as awareness-raising, training, and information campaigns, as well as the importance of an acknowledgement of the role of local authorities in delivering anti-discrimination strategies and the need for a better exchange of experience and good practice between local authorities in all areas of equality and non-discrimination.

In respect of the ageing population, CEMR believes it is important to counteract early retirement. Flexible forms of work should be introduced by such means as active mentorship, as part of older workers' downscaling of their employment and younger workers' workplace induction. New career options should be facilitated for employees in physically and mentally demanding occupations, where the individual is not usually able to work until the age of 65. Equivalent opportunities for employees' training and development should also be provided.

CEMR would welcome the comparison of experiences and good practice between EU member States, particularly within the local and regional government sector as it is at this level where many of the Union's policies are delivered.

CEMR trusts that the Commission finds that this response is constructive in identifying the problems which need to be tackled. We are of course concerned to see what may be the outcome of the consultation on the Green Paper because of the potential impact on local and regional authorities and their citizens. We would kindly ask the Commission to take CEMR's concern on board.