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"For Diversity - Against Discrimination": Diamantopoulou acts to boost awareness of new EU anti-discrimination rules

Would you know your rights if you were discriminated against? According to a new Eurobarometer survey on attitudes towards discrimination, only 1 in 3 Europeans would. Raising awareness of rights is one of the key aims of a new 5-year EU-wide campaign to combat discrimination on the grounds of racial and ethnic origin, religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation. The campaign was launched today in Brussels by Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner, Anna Diamantopoulou. The launch comes on the eve of the entry into force of two new EU Directives on anti-discrimination.¹

Commenting on the launch, Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou said, "Member States must do more to put EU anti-discrimination rules into force before the end of this year. I am extremely concerned that many Member States will miss the fast-approaching deadlines for implementation. If they are to be effective, these new rules must be known, understood and properly enforced. Otherwise, they will be a dead letter. The Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the EU has clearly shown that people are not sufficiently aware of their rights. That is why I am today launching a Europe-wide information campaign promoting the message 'For Diversity - Against Discrimination'. We all stand to benefit from ensuring that our workplaces and other areas of daily life are free from discrimination."

According to the results of the Eurobarometer survey on attitudes towards discrimination, most Europeans believe that a person's ethnic origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation or age can be an obstacle in finding a job, even where qualifications are equal. Most were opposed to discrimination under all circumstances, though they believed that their fellow citizens were more likely to discriminate, in particular against ethnic minorities. The survey also revealed that a fifth of those questioned said that they had personally witnessed discrimination on ethnic grounds, ranging between 15% in Ireland to 35% in the Netherlands.

Knowledge of rights varied from country to country, but overall two thirds of respondents would be unaware of their rights if they were discriminated against. A key aim of the information campaigns is to fill this awareness-gap and to highlight the rights and obligations under the new EU rules, as well as to raise awareness of the benefits of diversity more generally. With the slogan "For Diversity. Against Discrimination"², the campaigns will focus primarily in the first year on workplace discrimination, with trade unions and employers as the main target groups.

¹ Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC and the Employment Equality Directive 2000/78/EC – further information below.

² The slogan "For Diversity. Against Discrimination" will be adapted into all 11 EU languages in each Member State by the information campaign national advisory groups (composed of government representatives, social partners and NGOs).

The campaign poster portrays workplace discrimination taken to its extremes, with identical, featureless crash-test dummies performing routine office work. The caption "Our differences make the difference" aims to focus on the positive aspects of diversity for both employers and workers. As the recent EU Awards for Workplace Diversity showed³, more and more companies are taking an interest in diversity for business reasons, rather than simply to comply with legal requirements. Diversity policies increasingly form part of companies' broader strategy to build up human capital and encourage creativity and innovation. Employers also recognise that diversity can enhance corporate image and give companies a competitive edge in their dealings with customers, suppliers and shareholders.

The campaign website - www.stop-discrimination.info -, which goes on-line today, includes a user-friendly guide to the new EU legislation and a summary of the Eurobarometer survey.

National campaign measures, including events, seminars and media activities, will be developed over the coming months by national advisory groups (composed of national authorities, social partners and NGO's). The involvement of these key stakeholders is essential to ensure that country-specific needs are met and to feed into existing information activities. An EU-level advisory group (composed of representatives of the EU level social partners, European Platform of Social NGOs and representatives of Member State governments) was established last January to advise on the pan-European aspects of the campaigns, including the poster, slogan, and website.

Background

New European legislation adopted in 2000 prohibits racial discrimination in employment and other areas such as training, education, and the supply of and access to goods and services including housing. A second piece of legislation prohibits discrimination in employment and training on the grounds of religion and belief, disability, age and sexual orientation.

- The directive on equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of their racial or ethnic origin and covers most areas of everyday life in which unfair treatment might occur, either directly or indirectly. These areas include access to jobs, conditions at work, rates of pay and the rights and benefits linked to a job. They also include access to education and training, social security benefits and health care and equal rights to buy or rent goods and services, including housing. Governments have agreed to introduce the measures necessary to comply with this directive by 19 July 2003. In all countries, governments also have to designate a body to provide practical and independent support and guidance to victims of racial discrimination. This means creating a body to perform this role if one does not already exist.
- The second directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation prohibits discrimination in employment and training on grounds of a person's religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. In this case, governments have agreed to make the necessary changes to their national laws by 2 December 2003, although they can ask for an additional period of up to three years to make the changes needed to deal with disability and age discrimination. But if they do this, they have to report each year on the steps they are taking to tackle discrimination on these grounds and the progress they are making to bring their laws fully into line with the Directive.

³ see Commission press release **IP/03/438**

New Member States⁴ must also put the provisions of both Directives into national law before joining the Union.

More information on the new legislation, the Eurobarometer survey and the Information Campaigns can be found at: www.stop-discrimination.info

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⁴ Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.