



23 April 2008

Letter to President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso
 President of the Council, Prime Minister Janez Janša
 President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering

Dear Presidents,

Further legal steps are needed to advance equality for all in Europe

In 2004, Mr Barroso said that *“civil rights and an antidiscrimination approach will be top priorities for this Commission”*. One year before the end of his mandate and the European elections, the time has arrived to take the legal steps needed to promote equality for all in Europe.

European legislation has indeed this unique power to protect from discrimination any woman and man residing in the EU, from Paris to Warsaw, from Stockholm to Lisbon.

More than 90 % of respondents to the Commission’s consultation believe that there should be protection from discrimination on the grounds covered by Article 13 in education, social protection, housing health care or when buying goods or pay for services. 63% of the businesses included in the European Business Test Panel believe that it matters if there are different levels of protection between the EU Member States.

Eight years ago, the so-called “Race equality” and “Employment framework” directives were outstanding achievements for a Europe based on values and fundamental rights.

Today, the EU must not miss this opportunity to build on this legacy to adopt new legal steps to protect all people from all forms of discriminations.

On religious discrimination, we call for legal action to ensure equal protection for those with religions and those without, to improve the lives of Europe’s religious minorities, the Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, and others who face bullying and harassment, who are refused services, denied a decent education in a safe school environment, and who face discrimination in housing. Such legislation is necessary to prevent the exclusion and isolation of religious minorities demonized as the ‘other’ and make our societies more cohesive and inclusive.

On disability related discrimination, we welcome the Commission’s announcement to take legal action to ban discrimination against persons with disabilities in all areas of life in view of contributing to the implementation of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. We call for legal action with an ambitious scope as a response to the demands expressed by over 1.3 million citizens across the EU.

On discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, we call for legal action to improve the daily lives of the millions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Europe.

The daily experience of harassment, prejudice, violence, refusal of service, social exclusion and denial of equality in education, healthcare and in accessing goods and services requires similar legal protections in all countries.

On age discrimination we need legal action to combat discrimination older and younger people face in access to fundamental goods and services such as insurance products and healthcare services. The legislative initiative should therefore not include exception clauses for the insurance and health services. It should also include an article protecting preferential treatments that young and older people enjoy in many areas in order to protect young and older people's interests.

On gender discrimination, we recognize that the adopted directive on goods and services was a first step in addressing discrimination between women and men outside employment. However, we call for more legal action to ensure equal representation of women in decision-making. There is a need to legally protect women from all forms of violence including banning sexism in the media. It is crucial to eliminate discrimination in all areas of life, such as tax and social benefits, health and pensions for which unpaid care is not recognised. Education schemes encourage girls to choose "traditional-female" low paid jobs: Action targeting education systems must also be part of the legal framework.

Finally we still want to draw to your attention that Article 13 is limitative and does not cover all the types of discrimination prohibited by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Article 21 of the Charter is not limitative and provides that "*any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited*".

We therefore call on you to make sure that the future social agenda to be adopted in June 2008 includes a clear recommendation to broaden the scope of anti-discrimination legislation for all grounds and policies beyond Article 13.

Yours sincerely,



Conny Reuter
President of the Social Platform



Roshan Di Puppò
Director