

Cooperation among all stakeholders to fight against discrimination in EU

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The third Equality Summit focusing on Cooperation for Equality opened in Stockholm on Monday. Representatives from governments, human rights institutions, the business sector, the media and NGOs are gathering to discuss how to strengthen cooperation to combat discrimination. Member of the European Parliament Emine Bozkurt and Vice President of Social Platform Myria Vassiliadou stressed that the EU should play an important role in bringing about increased cooperation.

Ms. Vassiliadou said that inequality and discrimination require action and mobilisation in all areas and therefore the active cooperation of all actors.

“For example, governments and public institutions need to adopt legislation which in turn needs to be implemented by the legal profession, made known to the public, made visible etc. That is where the media and civil society become crucial actors as well. There are clear limitations as to what each actor can do in their own sector – discrimination cannot be solved in only one area of action”.

Ms. Vassiliadou said that systematic and comprehensive cooperation between all stakeholders is fundamental in this process.

“And at the end of the day, when individuals experience discrimination, they turn to different bodies and actors to resolve the problem. It is only through those bodies and actors carefully coordinating their efforts that individuals will be served and protected,” said Ms. Vassiliadou.

Member of the European Parliament Emine Bozkurt said that not only EU member States are responsible for bringing stakeholders together. The European institutions, the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament should step up efforts to enforce equal treatment for everybody in Europe. It is also important to have regular updates with the representatives of the organisations representing various NGOs working on all the discrimination grounds.

“I believe the Anti-discrimination Directive will give people a tool with which to fight discrimination. Many Member States currently lack laws that protect individuals against discrimination on the grounds of religion, homosexuality, disability or age, whereas there is protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender, race and ethnicity.

For example, if you entered a sports centre and were denied access because of the colour of your skin, you would have the law on your side. If somebody wearing a headscarf is denied access to that same sports centre there is not yet such a law. This difference in discrimination grounds needs

to be remedied,” said Bozkurt.

“A new directive on the grounds of age, disability, religion or belief, and sexual orientation is crucial because it provides real protection where there is clear evidence of discrimination happening, including in housing, access to goods and services, and access to health and education. For us, the same protection for everybody – regardless of discrimination grounds – is the simplest and fairest choice.

This would give Europe a strong and level playing field for all grounds of discrimination in all Member States. This should also include bringing the existing gender equality legislation in line with the Race Equality Directive,” said Vassiliadou.

Bozkurt said the concept of multiple discrimination should be included in the Directive.

“For instance, an elderly Muslim woman might feel that she has been discriminated against, without her knowing whether it was on the grounds of her age, religion or gender. But if she wants to fight this, in most Member States she would have to choose on what single ground she feels she has been discriminated against. A difficult and unfair decision to make.

It will be a great improvement when the issue of multiple discrimination is not only recognised, but also when people are given the opportunity to fight it,” said Bozkurt.

Xuefei Chen, People’s Daily Online, Stockholm.

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