

**EQUINET High-Level Meeting with
Heads of National Equality Bodies**

REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF EQUALITY BODIES
Tuesday 29 November 2011 (09.00-13.00)

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée
20 Rue des Sables, 1000 Brussels

KEY CONTRIBUTION & PARTICIPATION

Equality Bodies:

Heads and senior representatives of National Equality Bodies
Equinet Executive Board Members

European Commission:

Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea (*Keynote Speaker*), Director for Equality (DG Justice)

Council of Europe:

Thomas Hammarberg (*Keynote Speaker*), Commissioner for Human Rights

European Group of National Human Rights Institutions

Alan Miller (*Keynote Speaker*), Chair of the European Group of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and of the Scottish Human Rights Commission

Other relevant stakeholders – including:

EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Council of Europe - European Commission against Racism (ECRI), European Ombudsman.

OBJECTIVES

The high-level meeting will present a unique opportunity:

- to review the state of play in relation to promoting equality and non-discrimination in the European Union
- to discuss the potential of equality bodies and how best to realise this potential
- to discuss the need for clear standards for equality bodies
- to discuss the linkages between equality work and work on human rights, the consequences and the opportunities of this link
- to shape Equinet's future work on these themes



With the support of the European Commission

LANGUAGE & VENUE

The working languages of the meeting will be English and French.

The meeting will be held in central Brussels at the *Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée* (20 Rue des Sables, 1000 Bruxelles).

CONTEXT

National equality bodies are organisations created by national laws to combat discrimination and promote a more equal society. The European Union in the early 2000s played a key catalyser role by requiring the setting up of such institutions in each Member State for the protection against discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnic origin and gender. A number of Member States went further and gave wider powers to national equality bodies to provide protection against discrimination on grounds and in fields not covered by the EU directives. This support enabled equality bodies to establish themselves as key and high-potential actors in the field of equality and non-discrimination. However, in recent years many equality bodies have experienced serious challenges in a number of fields. Financial insecurity, the loss of some important powers, mergers with various other public institutions as well as high levels of under-reporting of discrimination present new challenges for equality bodies in achieving their full potential.

At the same time a new body of research and work at the European level underlines the importance of ensuring and enhancing the effective operation of equality bodies.

A recent European Commission Study on Equality Bodies set up under Directives 2000/43/EC, 2004/113/EC and 2006/54/EC (published in January 2011) acknowledges that *'Equality bodies are high potential actors in terms of combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities'* and lists a number of areas where national equality bodies can contribute to the building of a fairer society. At the same time, the study identifies key criteria that need to be met if an equality body is to reach its full potential. In particular, the study recommends that *'the European Commission should encourage the development of standards for the structures, powers and operation of equality bodies'*.

Furthermore, the Opinion of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights on national structures for promoting equality (published in March 2011) aims to provide *basic standards* for the setting up of effective equality bodies; to help national equality bodies to realize their full potential; and to address the vulnerability of equality bodies. Based on the key indicators of *independence and effectiveness* it provides a useful set of standards for equality bodies.

A sociological research currently conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights will provide a useful insight into the role of national equality bodies in securing effective access to justice for victims of discrimination. The study will analyse the learning of equality





bodies as well as the experiences of civil society and victims of discrimination in order to help realize equality bodies' full potential in providing independent assistance to victims.

EQUINET HIGH-LEVEL MEETING WITH THE HEADS OF NATIONAL EQUALITY BODIES

Equinet is organizing this second high-level meeting with Heads of National Equality Bodies encouraged by and building on the success and added-value of a previous high-level meeting (in March 2009 in Brussels) with the participation of the heads of national equality bodies, European Commissioner (Vladimir Špidla) and Members of the European Parliament.

This half-day interactive Equinet high-level meeting with heads of national equality bodies will provide a unique opportunity to discuss with key European stakeholders the most pertinent questions related to the promotion of equality and the effective role of equality bodies including those important trends and novelties in the legal and policy sphere that influence and provide a background to the work of national equality bodies.

During the first session of the meeting, the heads of equality bodies will engage in a discussion and exchange with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe on the potential of equality bodies in promoting equality and the need for clear standards for equality bodies. The discussion will focus on the work done by the Commissioner for Human Rights on national structures for promoting equality and on issues of equality that the equality bodies could respond to and on the practical experience, situation and ambitions of the equality bodies.

During the second session of the meeting, the heads of equality bodies will engage in a discussion and exchange with a high-level representative (Director for equality) of the European Commission on the potential of equality bodies in promoting equality and the need for clear standards for equality bodies. The discussion will focus on the work commissioned by the European Commission on equality bodies as well as relevant equality issues at EU level and on the perspectives of the equality bodies on the most important factors and standards that will enable equality bodies to reach their full potential.

In the third session of the high-level meeting, equality bodies and participants will discuss the links between equality and work on wider human rights issues. The discussions will focus on the opportunities and the risks of institutionally linking these two areas and will seek to identify guiding principles and practical approaches that secure an effective focus on both areas.



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DRAFT OUTLINE PROGRAMME OF THE EQUINET HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

08.45 - 09.15: **Registration**

09.15 – 09.30: **Welcome & Opening**

- **Mandana Zarrehparvar**, Chair of Equinet Board - Institute for Human Rights, Denmark

09.30 – 10.30 Session 1: **The potential of equality bodies in promoting equality and the need for clear standards for equality bodies – a Council of Europe Perspective**

Chair: **Kalliopi Spanou**, The Greek Ombudsman

Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Response from Equinet - national equality bodies' perspective – **Jozef De Witte**, Director, Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism

Discussion with heads of national equality bodies

10.30 – 11.30 Session 2: **The potential of equality bodies in promoting equality and the need for clear standards for equality bodies – a European Commission Perspective**

Chair: **Evelyn Collins**, Executive Director - Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea, Director for Equality - European Commission, DG Justice

Response from Equinet – national equality bodies' perspective: **Mandana Zarrehparvar**, Chair of Equinet Board - Institute for Human Rights, Denmark

Discussion with heads of national equality bodies

11.30 – 12.00 *Coffee break / Networking*

12.00 – 13.00 Session 3: **Discussion on the links between equality work and work on human rights: the opportunities, the risks and the guiding principles**

(Chair: **Dejan Palić** - Deputy Ombudsman - Office of the Ombudsman, Croatia)

Niall Crowley, Adviser to the Equinet Board: Presentation of the Equinet Perspective *Equality And Human Rights – Making Links To Maximise Impact*

Alan Miller, Chair of the European Group of National Human Rights Institutions and of the Scottish Human Rights Commission

Response from Equinet – national equality bodies perspective - **Laurien Koster**, President - The Equal treatment Commission, The Netherlands

Discussion with heads of national equality bodies

13.00 – 14.00 *Networking Lunch*

