

Boyko BORISOV
Prime Minister
Republic of Bulgaria

Brussels, 27th May 2009

Re: Bulgarian Commission for Protection against Discrimination

Dear Mr. Borisov,

We are writing you to encourage your support and commitment to maintain the effectiveness and independence of the Bulgarian Commission for Protection against Discrimination (KZD).

EQUINET is the European Network of national equality bodies with membership from across the European Union and beyond. EQUINET aims to enhance cooperation between specialised equality bodies and seeks to act as a point of support to and development of national equality bodies in the implementation of their core functions as defined in the anti-discrimination EU Directives.

The Bulgarian Commission for Protection against Discrimination is an active member of the EQUINET network and effectively works towards combating discrimination as a national equality body. The activities carried out through the recent years by the Bulgarian equality body made a significant contribution to equality in the Bulgarian society and serve as examples for other recently acceded EU countries.

We are writing to express our concerns with regard to the fact that the National Assembly is currently deliberating a draft law amending the Protection against Discrimination Act reducing the equality body's size from nine to seven Members and imposing substantial budget cuts.

The Bulgarian Commission for Protection against Discrimination, as an independent specialised state authority for the protection against discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities, plays a crucial role in considering and resolving cases of discrimination, establishing infringements of the equal treatment principles and providing independent assistance to the victims of discrimination. The Commission investigates, considers and decides an ever growing number of complaints submitted to it in three-member Boards specialized in various grounds and in five-member Boards in the cases of multiple discrimination.

We are concerned that with the proposed reduction in the size and financial resources of the Commission, the equality body will not be able to effectively fulfil its mandate to hear cases of unequal treatment.

This situation could also undermine the achievements of the anti-discrimination policy of the Republic of Bulgaria and could result in limitation of access to assistance for victims of

unequal treatment in the country. The disadvantaged groups are the ones most affected in the current times of economic downturn and are also most often subjected to discrimination in the labour market and other areas of life. At the same time, no stable recovery from the current crisis and return to sustainable growth is possible with the exclusion of certain members of the society, without the use of their talent and capabilities in the workforce and in other areas of society. It is therefore important to sustain the protection provided for these groups experiencing inequality, in which the Commission for Protection against Discrimination plays an invaluable role.

We would like to take this opportunity to stress that the EU equality Directives require Member States to establish and make the necessary arrangements for a body or bodies competent to tackle discrimination in various fields of life independently and effectively. The main competences of specialised equality body or bodies shall be as follows:

- providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination
- conducting independent surveys concerning discrimination
- publishing independent reports and
- making recommendations on any issue relating to discrimination

Inevitably, the institution is only able to function adequately and effectively when sufficient funding and staff are allocated.

We strongly believe that your personal commitment to equality and human rights will help in maintaining an effective equality body in Bulgaria to promote equal opportunities and tackle discrimination.

We thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your urgent response to this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mandana Zarrehparvar
Chair of Equinet



Anne Gaspard
Director of EQUINET Secretariat