The European Union and the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities

Summary: This chapter identifies a number of specific EU initiatives that concern the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and it also explains how minority issues may be emphasized in EU activities that promote human rights in general. The EU has put in place a legal framework to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia and contributes financially to programmes that support activities aimed at combating these phenomena on the ground. The EU raises minority issues in its political dialogues with third countries and co-operates actively at UN fora to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities. In addition, the EU uses a wide range of financial and technical cooperation instruments, including bilateral cooperation with governments and direct support to civil society, complementing each other and working in synergy to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Treaty on European Union

According to the Treaty on European Union\(^1\) (“TEU”), the “Union is founded on the value of respect for human dignity [...], equality [...] and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities” (Article 2 TEU). Article 3 TEU commits the Union to promote these values, combat social exclusion and discrimination, respect its cultural and linguistic diversity, safeguard and enhance Europe’s cultural heritage and uphold and promote its values in its relations with the wider world.

The Treaty also states, in Article 6 TEU, that the Union recognises the rights, freedoms and principles set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union\(^2\), including the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of membership in a national minority (Article 21 of the Charter).

The EU and its bodies, as well as the Member States when implementing union law, are bound by these provisions. However, they do not provide the EU with powers to adopt measures beyond those areas over which the EU has competence. In non-EU areas, it is up to EU Member States to ensure the protection of fundamental rights, through the application of their own legislation and implementation of their international obligations.

Minorities in the European Union

In the EU, too many persons belonging to minorities still face threats, discrimination and racism. They are confronted with the risk of being excluded from fully taking part in the

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\(^1\) OJ 2008/C 115/01.
\(^2\) OJ 2000/C 364/01.
economic, political, social and cultural life available to majorities in the countries or societies where they live. The TEU gives powers to the Union to adopt a number of instruments that contribute to the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities. In applying these powers, the EU has put in place a legal framework to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia and has contributed financially to programmes to support activities aimed at combating these phenomena on the ground.

**Legal framework to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia**

Discrimination on grounds such as racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief is incompatible with the basic principles on which the European Union is founded (see Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The EU has been working hard in recent years to complete its internal legislative framework to fight racism and discrimination. The Diversity & Non-discrimination section of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities provides regularly updates information on the EU’s fight against discrimination and related EU legislation ([http://ec.europa.eu/anti-discrimination](http://ec.europa.eu/anti-discrimination)).

Member States' governments are required under EU anti-discrimination law (Directive 2000/43/EC) to enact national legislation which prohibits discrimination on grounds of race or ethnic origin in the areas of employment, education, social protection as well as access to goods and services. The protection against discrimination in this area applies to everybody living in the EU, and not only to EU citizens. The Directive allows Member States to adopt positive measures. Moreover, Member States are obliged to designate or set up an independent body, to help people who have been discriminated against on the grounds of their racial or ethnic origin to get advice and support to pursue their complaints. Most of these bodies are part of Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies, which develops co-operation and facilitates the exchange of information and good practice between the national organisations. A full list of Equinet members and observers is available on the Equinet website at [http://www.equineteurope.org/](http://www.equineteurope.org/).

Another example of EU legislation to fight racism and xenophobia is the Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law (2008/913/JHA), which was adopted in 2008. Requiring domestic adoption of appropriate laws, it aims to ensure that racist and xenophobic offences are sanctioned in all EU Member States by effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties. The punishable offences include public incitement to violence or hatred against a group of persons or a member of such a group, defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin. Such incitement is also to be punishable if committed through public dissemination or distribution of tracts, pictures or other material. The public condoning, denial or gross trivialization of the Nazi crimes, crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, when the conduct is carried out in a manner likely to incite to violence or hatred, are also to be

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3 OJ 2008/C 115/01.
4 OJ 2000/L 180/22.
5 OJ 2008/L 328/55.
punished. For any criminal offences other than those covered by the Framework Decision, Member States are obliged to ensure that racist and xenophobic motivation is considered as an aggravating circumstance or, alternatively, that such motivation may be taken into account in the determination of the punishment. The Framework Decision provides for the liability of legal, as well as natural persons. Any person who is a victim of a crime referred to in the Framework Decision can initiate legal proceedings against the alleged perpetrator in accordance with national law, e.g., by reporting the incident to the nearest police station. Further information on the Framework Decision is available at http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/combating_discrimination/l33178_en.htm.

**Information and awareness raising about rights and obligations**

Although legislation prohibiting discrimination against persons belonging to minorities is an absolute prerequisite, on its own it cannot achieve the goal of creating a society which is free from discrimination. Deep-rooted disadvantages faced by people because of their personal characteristics may impede them from fully participating and contributing at all levels of society, which is why the EU seeks to improve knowledge about discrimination and to raise awareness among the population both of their rights and also of the benefits of diversity. By way of example, the EU supports an information campaign ‘For diversity. Against discrimination’ across Europe to make more people aware of their rights and responsibilities, featuring public events, awards for journalists and competitions for young people. The film ‘A Diverse Society: Tackling Discrimination Across Europe’, for instance, explores equality and diversity under EU law and where to seek help if someone has suffered discrimination. It can be viewed online on the ‘For Diversity. Against Discrimination.’ campaign website at www.stop-discrimination.info.

**Cooperation with civil society**

The European Commission consults with civil society organisations when formulating and implementing its policies on non-discrimination. It regularly organises consultations to seek the views of the public before taking major policy initiatives, and it cooperates with social sector non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) through the European civil dialogue. Not least, these consultations serve the purpose of collecting ideas and suggestions from key stakeholders and experts on how to achieve the greatest possible impact with non-discrimination policies. To find out more about how civil society can get involved, see http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=85&langId=en.

The EU also financially supports intermediary actors – such as non-profit organisations, voluntary associations, foundations, NGOs and similar bodies – that are active in the fight against discrimination, racism and xenophobia. For example, the EU provides financial support to NGOs and other entities through its Specific Programme on Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. The general objectives of this Programme include promoting development of a European society based on respect for fundamental rights; strengthening civil society; fighting racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism; and improving interfaith and intercultural understanding and tolerance throughout the EU.
Further information on the programme (including calls for proposals and electronic applications) is available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/rights/funding_rights_en.htm.

**Coordination of national policies for an inclusive society**

Central policy areas for the inclusion of ethnic minorities – such as education, employment, or social inclusion – are in the competence of Member States. The EU coordinates, however, national policies by means of common objectives, policy guidelines, and indicators. Member States draw up national reform programmes and national action plans which are the basis of joint reporting and peer reviews. This peer learning exercise aims at encouraging the transfer of good practice. EU Structural Funds, and in particular the European Social Fund, serve as tool to implement the national programmes and plans.

**EU Agency for Fundamental Rights**

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (“FRA”) is based in Vienna and carries out its tasks independently. It cooperates with other national and international bodies and organisations, in particular with the Council of Europe. The FRA provides the relevant institutions and authorities of the EU and its Member States, when implementing EU law, with assistance and expertise relating to fundamental rights in order to support them when they formulate courses of action within their respective spheres of competence. While the Agency focuses on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU and its 27 member States, candidate countries and countries which have concluded a stabilisation and association agreement with the EU also can be invited to participate.

The Agency is not empowered to examine individual complaints or exercise regulatory decision-making powers. It does not monitor the situation of fundamental rights in EU countries for the purposes of Article 7 TEU (which provides for the possibility of action against a Member State in case of serious fundamental rights violation), nor does it deal with the legality of Community acts and their legal transposition by Member States into national law.

*Information and data collection and analysis*

The FRA collects and analyses official and unofficial information and data on fundamental rights issues within the EU. Given the differences in data availability and quality across the EU, the Agency is also developing methods and standards to improve data quality and comparability. However, since such secondary data are often not available, the agency conducts its own EU-wide policy-relevant research and surveys and encourages others to do so.

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7 The stabilisation and association process is the framework for EU negotiations with the Western Balkan countries, which will lead to their eventual accession.
In its research work, the Agency examines contributory factors, as well as development policies, which affect fundamental rights. A very important part of the Agency's work is to identify positive initiatives that promote the respect and protection of fundamental rights. The Agency publishes an annual report on fundamental rights in the EU and thematic reports based on its research and surveys, highlighting examples of good practice regarding fundamental rights.

The Agency regularly publishes reports and publications covering minority issues. Recent publications include the following reports:


**Networking and cooperation**

The Agency works to support an environment in which fundamental rights promotion and protection at all levels of society will become a natural reflex activity. Engaging with the Agency's stakeholders, the wider human rights community, those at the national and local level responsible for providing services and those who make use of the services is seen as an essential part of supporting this mandate. Another key component is adapting the Agency's work to make use of the new communication and networking environment – an environment witnessing a democratisation of information collection and dissemination and greater activity via social networks and social media.

The Agency, as an EU body, works with all relevant EU institutions and advisory bodies. At the international level, the Agency works closely with the Council of Europe, as well as with OSCE, UN and UNESCO.

**Cooperation with civil society and awareness raising**
In accordance with the Regulation establishing the FRA, the Agency promotes dialogue with civil society and works closely with NGOs and institutions of civil society active in the field of fundamental rights. In order to improve dialogue and coordination with all relevant stakeholders, the FRA launched in 2008 the Fundamental Rights Platform ("FRP") – a network for cooperation and information exchange between the Agency and civil society. The Platform is open to all interested and qualified civil society organisations based in any one of the EU Member States, including human rights NGOs; trade unions; employer's organisations; relevant social and professional organisations; churches; religious, philosophical and non-confessional organisations; universities; and individual experts from European and international bodies.

The main tasks of the Platform are:

- To involve civil society organisations as partners in various stages (from inception to evaluation) of the FRA’s research, activities, education and awareness-raising projects. For example, NGOs participate in the inception meetings of the FRA’s projects and thereby help to shape their terms of reference and guarantee that Agency projects contribute to practical solutions in the field. At a later stage, some NGOs may act as researchers or external contractors. In order to facilitate synergies between the Agency’s work and NGOs’ activities, key stakeholders also receive the findings of the FRA’s research in advance (e.g. embargoed copies of reports), and they act as important partners to disseminate research results.
- To give feedback and suggestions for the Agency’s Annual Work Programme, as well as its Annual Report.

Members of the Fundamental Rights Platform meet annually. In 2009, the Platform brought together 142 organisations from across the European Union. In November 2009, the FRA launched a drive to increase participation in the Platform, which is expected to expand to around 300 organisations active in the various fields of the Agency’s work. In 2010, an interactive web-forum will be launched in order to facilitate consultations between civil society and the FRA and to encourage dialogue among different stakeholders from across the EU.\(^8\)

### EU Action for the Roma

The Roma community is now the EU’s largest ethnic minority, and measures to promote equal treatment of Roma are therefore of particular concern to the EU. The EU seeks to improve the living standards of the Roma minority in close cooperation with Member States, within their respective competences. Key tools in this respect are EU legislation; the coordination of national policies in important areas, such as education, employment and social inclusion; funding programs; and governance mechanisms. The 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion provide guidance for the design and implementation of successful policies in this area.

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Facts and Figures

An estimated 10-12 million Roma live in EU Member States, candidate countries and potential candidates, often in difficult situations. According to reports and surveys carried out in recent years, Roma face a high risk of discrimination and social exclusion. The European Union tackles these problems in close cooperation with EU Member States, which are primarily responsible for the central issues of education, employment, housing, health, urban development and the fight against poverty. The EU follows an approach on Roma issues that is “explicit, but not exclusive”: Roma inclusion is not separated from mainstream EU activities; rather, attention is paid to the specific situation of Roma within all EU policies and instruments that try to improve the overall social and economic situation of Europeans. The web portal for information on all of the EU’s activities concerning Roma is http://ec.europa.eu/roma.

Legislation

The EU legislation on discrimination, racism and xenophobia or freedom of movement (see above) fully applies to Roma who are in their majority EU citizens.

Coordination of national policies

The EU coordinates central policy areas that are within national competence and that are highly relevant for Roma inclusion, such as education, employment, social protection and social inclusion. This coordination of national policies is based on agreed common objectives, indicators, reporting and peer learning activities. To this end, Member States develop national action plans and report on their implementation. The joint reports, country specific recommendations and peer reviews highlight the situation of Roma and public policy initiatives aimed at its improvement.

Funding

The financial assets of the Community also contribute to support the full participation of Roma in society. The European Social Fund supports employment and helps people enhance their education and skills; the European Regional Development Fund supports regional development, economic change, enhanced competitiveness and territorial co-operation throughout the EU; the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development aims at improving the living conditions in rural areas of the EU. The PROGRESS program, including the ‘For Diversity. Against Discrimination’ information campaign, funds awareness-raising activities which aim to combat discrimination against Roma and support the operations of an EU-wide network of NGOs representing Roma and defending their rights. Other activities and funding mechanisms can also be used to aid Roma inclusion, for example, the Lifelong Learning Program, the Youth in Action Program, the Culture Program (2007-2013), and the Health Program 2008-2013. Regularly updated information on funding opportunities can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=634&langId=en.
EU Platform for Roma Inclusion

The involvement of civil society is recognised as decisive to mobilize expertise and disseminate knowledge, which is required to develop public debate and accountability. The European Commission promotes the active involvement of Roma civil society in European decision making, e.g., through the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion. The platform meetings aim at stimulating cooperation and exchanges of experience on successful Roma inclusion policies and practices, bringing together national governments, the EU, international organisations and Roma civil society representatives. For information on how to get involved in the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion, see http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=761&langId=en.

One of the first results of the Platform process was the elaboration of 10 **Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion**. These principles aim at guiding EU institutions and Member States when they design and implement policies, programs or projects for Roma inclusion. They represent a legally non-binding but significant political declaration. By approving the principles, EU Member States have demonstrated their commitment to basing future initiatives on these principles.

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting
3. Inter-cultural approach
4. Aiming for the mainstream
5. Awareness of the gender dimension
6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
7. Use of Community instruments
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
9. Involvement of civil society
10. Active participation of the Roma

Some of the principles are well-established, while others are innovative, such as:

- ‘Explicit but not exclusive targeting’, which, instead of singling out Roma as a distinct group, aims at improving the living standards and environment of all those living in similar conditions;
- The ‘inter-cultural approach’, which stresses that both Roma and mainstream society have much to learn from each other and that inter-cultural learning and skills deserve to be promoted, alongside combating prejudices and stereotypes;
- ‘Aiming for the mainstream’, which emphasises that policies should support Roma to participate fully in mainstream society, rather than developing separate Roma settlements or labour markets.

The rights of persons belonging to minorities and the EU enlargement process

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9 Available at http://ec.europa.eu/roma.
A growing membership has been part of the development of European integration from the beginning. In many of the current candidate countries and potential candidates, persons belonging to minorities have been identified as being among the most vulnerable, which is why minority issues are a crucial element in the context of the EU enlargement process. Protection of minorities, particularly Roma, has been highlighted as essential in an enlarged Union in a number of resolutions adopted by the European Parliament.\textsuperscript{10} The situation in most post-war Western Balkan countries, for example, includes large numbers of refugees or internally displaced persons. Ambitious laws and strategies often lack sufficient implementing procedures and resources, and most minorities still suffer from discrimination, segregation and limited participation in politics, administration and business. Turkey defines minorities narrowly, restricting its scope to Armenians, Jews and Rum (Greek Orthodox). Other groups, such as the Kurds or Roma, do not fully enjoy their cultural rights, despite recent progress.

The 1993 Copenhagen political criteria\textsuperscript{11} that an applicant country must meet include respect for and protection of minorities. Similar references are included in the Accession and European Partnerships, which form the framework of the pre-accession process for each candidate country. Minority issues are regularly raised in political dialogue meetings with candidate countries, and, during accession negotiations, minority issues are covered by the negotiating Chapter 23 (‘Judiciary and fundamental rights’).\textsuperscript{12}

The record of candidate countries and potential candidates on minority issues is systematically assessed in the annual progress reports published by the European Commission.\textsuperscript{13} For instance, the 2008 report on Croatia points out that, while the position of minorities in Croatia had continued to improve, many problems remained for Serbs and Roma; likewise, some progress on outstanding refugee return issues had been made, but efforts to ensure sustainability of refugee return needed to be accelerated.

Complementing internal EU legislation are various mechanisms adopted under the auspices of the Council of Europe, which are discussed in chapter xx.

Non-governmental or civil society organisations play a vital role in the reforms carried out in candidates and potential candidate countries, and their work can prove crucial in determining the pace and quality of the accession process. The European Commission cooperates closely and consults with civil society, both at the European and the local level, in order to get best possible information on progress made and possible shortcomings in reform efforts. Civil society actors wanting to become involved in the consultations should contact the Enlargement Directorate General (via the Dialogue with

\textsuperscript{10} The resolutions are available online at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/comparl/afet/droi/others/default.htm.
\textsuperscript{11} European Council on Copenhagen - 21-22 JUNE 1993- Conclusions of the Presidency, DOC/93/3.
\textsuperscript{12} For the purpose of the accession negotiations, the EU legislation is divided into 35 subject-related chapters. More information on the mandate and the framework of accession negotiations is available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/the-policy/process-of-enlargement/mandate-and-framework_en.htm.
\textsuperscript{13} All progress reports are publicly available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/progress_reports/index_en.htm.

The EU provides focused pre-accession financial aid to candidate countries and potential candidates in order to help them introduce the necessary political, economic and institutional reforms to comply with EU standards, and a key focus of such assistance is human rights, the protection of minorities and development of civil society. Considerable technical and financial assistance to vulnerable groups, including minorities, is provided under the Instrument for pre-accession assistance (“IPA”), covering a wide range of activities in areas such as education, social protection, non-discrimination and reconciliation. One example is the current multi-beneficiary project, which addresses the widespread lack of personal documentation of Roma in Western Balkan countries by assisting Roma in receiving identity papers – often a precondition for access to education, employment or social security.

Support to civil society development and dialogue focuses on three primary areas:

- support to local civic initiatives and capacity building to enforce the role of civil society;
- visitor programmes to EU bodies for groups with influence over decision making and society, such as journalists, young politicians, trade union leaders and teachers;
- creating partnerships between civil society organisations and the EU designed to lead to a transfer of knowledge and networks.


Another financial instrument with a clear focus on supporting civil society is the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (“EIDHR”), which is discussed further below. In the pre-accession context, the EIDHR projects for persons belonging to minorities are predominantly aimed at reducing social disparities; improving quality of life; and strengthening social cohesion through integrating disadvantaged people, combating discrimination, and strengthening human capital, notably by reforming education systems. For example, the EIDHR funded a project in Turkey to create the conditions to improve co-operation between majority and minority ethnic, linguistic and religious communities and the to encourage the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Turkish society.

The rights of persons belonging to minorities and relations between the EU and the wider world
The European Union has made human rights a central aspect of its external relations, through the political dialogues it holds with third countries, its actions in multilateral fora, such as the UN, and its development policies and assistance. The promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities is a key feature of the EU’s external human rights policy.

The EU supports the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which it considers to be the key reference text on the rights of persons belonging to minorities at the global level. In Europe, the legal framework is most prominently influenced by the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The EU seeks to integrate human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, into all aspects of its external policies. In order to examine these issues in greater depth in its bilateral relations with certain countries, the EU has initiated human rights dialogues, pursuant to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues.14 The EU raises minority issues in these dialogues with third countries on a regular basis. Civil society is closely involved in human rights dialogues in that the EU regularly meets with local civil society representatives in the margins of these dialogues. The EU also facilitates dialogue between human rights defenders and the authorities of the dialogue country. Civil society actors interested in human rights dialogues should contact the EU Delegation for the country concerned; contact details are available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/delegations/web_en.htm. Information on all human rights dialogues is available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/dialogues/index_en.htm.

The EU also champions the promotion and protection of minority rights in multinational fora. The EU enjoys observer status at the UN and cooperates with EU Member States to forge common EU positions and reach out to third countries, with a view to further improving the global situation of human rights in general and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, in particular, notably in the UN Human Rights Council and in the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural (Third) Committee of the UN General Assembly. The EU attaches great importance to the work of UN Special Procedures, including the Independent Expert on minority issues. The EU also considers the annual Forum on Minority Issues a key process in the promotion of dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to the rights of minorities. The European Commission works closely with, inter alia, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the OSCE (in particular its High Commissioner on National Minorities), the Council of Europe and the World Bank. For additional information on EU action in multilateral fora on human rights and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, see http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/fora/index_en.htm.

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The EU uses a wide range of financial and technical cooperation instruments, including bilateral cooperation with governments and direct support to civil society, to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities. It supports government programs and policies that target minorities or that have a potential impact in this area, such as support for long-term solutions to the protracted refugee situation of Muslim minorities from Myanmar (Northern Rakhine State) in Bangladesh.

The European Union supports civil society organizations concerned with minorities through a number of thematic programmes, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (“EIDHR”) and the Non State Actors and Local Authorities in Development programme (“NSA-LA”).

The EIDHR approaches minority issues with the aim of combating discrimination; promoting equal participation of men and women from minority communities in social, economic and political life; and strengthening human rights and democratic political participation. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, the EIDHR has funded a project to strengthen minority group interaction with state bodies, NGOs, political representation and participation at local and national levels and involvement in democratic reforms. The EIDHR is currently also funding a three-year project, implemented by Minority Rights Group International (in co-operation with the OHCHR, Council of Europe and Forum Asia), which is intended to build the capacity of 1,080 activists in 36 states in Europe, Asia and Africa to carry out relevant and high quality advocacy nationally, regionally and at the UN on behalf of and with minority communities. Another example is the EU-Council of Europe Joint Programme on “Minorities in Russia: developing languages, culture, media and civil society”, which aims at facilitating the process of ratification by the Russian Federation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. EIDHR projects are managed either from headquarters in Brussels or by one of over 130 EU delegations and offices around the world. While the projects’ beneficiaries vary according to the objectives, calls for project proposals are generally open to civil society organisations based anywhere in the world.

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The NSA-LA programme provides capacity building to civil society organisations and local authorities in order to facilitate their involvement in the policy-making process and to enhance their capacity to deliver basic services to the poorest peoples in developing countries. Civil society organisations representing (or working on behalf of) minorities are eligible for funding, depending on the priorities of calls for proposals. In Bangladesh, for instance, the NSA-LA has funded Caritas France in partnership with Caritas Bangladesh for a project aimed at improving the living conditions of outcaste and minority groups, with particular attention to women’s status. In Colombia, funding was provided to the international NGO Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe for a program aimed at developing and applying a model of integrated and sustainable development to overcome poverty, promote human rights, and strengthen access to services in the El Choco’ department, an area inhabited by a large Afro-Colombian population.

All EIDHR and NSA-LA calls for proposals, whether global or local, together with information for civil society actors on how to apply for funding by responding to calls for proposals, are published at the EIDHR and NSA-LA websites at http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/human-rights/index_en.htm and http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/dci/non_state_actors_en.htm.

Finally, EU policies increasingly recognize the need to ensure the maximum involvement of all segments of civil society in the development cooperation process, including the participation of organisations promoting the rights of minorities in the formulation and implementation of development strategies and programmes. This happens mainly on the occasion of the (i) formulation and review of EU Country Strategy Papers, National Indicative Programmes and ENP Action Plans, (ii) identification of priority areas for local calls for proposals under the EIDHR and NSA-LA programs, and (iii) identification and formulation of EC-funded government programs in social and human development, governance, environment, and other relevant sectors, where appropriate. The EuropeAid Co-operation Office of the European Commission is responsible for implementing external aid programmes and projects across the world. More information about EuropeAid’s initiatives to improve dialogue with civil society may be found at http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/who/partners/civil-society/dialogue_en.htm.

**Conclusion**

The Treaty on the European Union explicitly states that the rights of persons belonging to minorities are among the values upon which the Union is founded and which it is explicitly committed to promote inside the Union and in its relations with the wider world. The EU has put in place a legal framework to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia and contributes financially to programmes to support activities aimed at combating these phenomena on the ground. The EU raises minority issues in its political dialogues with third countries and co-operates actively in UN fora in the promotion and

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18 For more information, please visit the NSA-LA website at http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/dci/non_state_actors_en.htm.
protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities. In addition, the EU uses a wide range of financial and technical cooperation instruments, including bilateral cooperation with governments and direct support to civil society, complementing each other and working in synergy to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Contacts and further information:

All relevant information on mandates, activities, documents, and other activities of the European Commission can be accessed through its website: http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm.

Postal address:

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels
BELGIUM

European Commission services particularly relevant to minority issues can be contacted at:

Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security
Email: JLS-charte@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/justice_home/index_en.htm

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
Contact form: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=2#contact
http://ec.europa.eu/social/home.jsp?langId=en

Directorate-General for Enlargement
Email: elarg-info@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/index_en.htm

Directorate-General for External Relations
Email: Relex-Feedback@ec.europa.eu

Directorate-General Development and Relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific States
Contact form: http://ec.europa.eu/development/services/contact_form_web_en.cfm
http://ec.europa.eu/development/index_en.cfm

EuropeAid Co-operation Office
Email: europeaid-info@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm
How to contact the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights?

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)
Schwarzenbergplatz 11
1040 Wien
Austria
+43 1 580 30 634
information@fra.europa.eu
Please visit FRA’s web site: www.fra.europa.eu