

Towards Living Together with Equal Rights and in Diversity – The "European Coalition of Cities Against Racism"

In the past century, millions of people fell victim to the racial hatred propagated by the Nazis. Auschwitz has become a symbol for the depths of barbarism which racism and discrimination can lead to. Here and in many other places within Europe, it became clear what human beings are capable of doing to other human beings. We must never forget this message – it is our responsibility both to the past and to the future. And looking at this issue, we have again reason for concern and increased commitment:

Radically rightwing attitudes, and extreme rightwing ideologies insisting on the inequality of human beings are no longer a marginal phenomenon, but by now have become deeply rooted in some parts of European society. Everyday racism and racially motivated violence in various forms – from verbal attacks and harassment to physical attacks, arson and even murder – have become bitter reality in most European countries. The victims are predominantly asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and members of ethnic or religious minorities. Racism and discrimination not only violate the dignity and the rights of the people affected, they seep in like a slow poison, they are a cancerous growth endangering peace, security and social cohesion in our societies. They constitute an attack on the basic values of our democracy.

The essential role of city authorities

Cities play a particularly important role in effectively combating this disconcerting development. Because it is in the cities that people from various national, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds live together in close proximity, and it is mainly the cities which are challenged by deep economic and social changes in this globalised and increasingly complex world, changes which have led to many and diverse forms of fear of strangers, racism and discrimination.

The "European Coalition of Cities Against Racism"

Recognising this, and following a UNESCO initiative, the "European Coalition of Cities Against Racism" was founded in Nuremberg on 10 December, 2004. A "Ten-Point-Plan of Action" was adopted which is to serve member cities as a basis for future activities. In the meantime, over 70 municipalities from 15 European countries have joined the network and adopted the Action Plan. This is an encouraging development.

The goals of the "European Coalition of Cities Against Racism"

The Coalition set itself the following goals:

- fighting racism and discrimination at a municipal level and thus making a contribution to safeguarding human rights, promoting integration and respect for diversity in Europe;
- supporting member cities in this task via the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action Against Racism" and assisting them in establishing priorities, optimising their strategies and intensifying their co-operation;
- strengthening the co-operation with institutions and organisations which are also committed to fighting racism and discrimination; and

- representing and promoting the common interests of member cities at the European Union, the Council of Europe and with the governments of European states.

The "Ten-Point Action Plan Against Racism"

The "Ten-Point-Plan of Action" of the "European Coalition of Cities Against Racism" was worked out during an experts' conference in July 2004 in Nuremberg and lists ten core fields of activity, including those main areas where racist and discriminating behaviour is manifested most often, such as for example the labour market, the housing sector and the education system. For each of these ten fields of activity, several concrete suggestions for municipal action are made. The decision in which particular field any city must take measures, can, of course, only be made by the individual member cities themselves. This is why the first two points of the Action Plan suggest how the local situation might be analysed and evaluated so that on this basis, suitable strategies may be worked out specifically for this city.

It is not possible, to explain the Action Plan in great detail here. I would just like to pick out some fields of activity which play a particularly important role in fighting racism and discrimination at a municipal level:

- Point 3 of the Action Plan demands better support for victims of racist and discriminatory behaviour, and the suggestion is made that the post of an ombudsperson or an anti-discrimination unit should be established within the municipal authority. In addition, local institutions and organisations which provide legal and psychological support to victims, should be supported.
- Point 4 recommends that citizens should receive better information on their rights and obligations, on protective and legal options and on the penalties for racist acts or behaviour, and that the public should be included in municipal activities. This is why it is suggested that every year, the "International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination", on 21 March, should be commemorated with a wide range of events, in order to sensitise citizens to the issues of racism and discrimination.
- Point 5 looks at the labour market and suggests that all municipal contracts and licenses should include non-discrimination clauses, and that local companies who actively support the struggle against racism and discrimination, should be publicly commended.
- Point 6 commits the city as an employer and service provider to safeguarding equal opportunities and equal treatment. On the one hand this means that the intercultural competence of municipal employees must be promoted, and on the other hand it demands that the representation of persons with a migration background and from discriminated groups on the city staff be improved.
- Point 7 suggests possibilities for combating discrimination in the housing sector, including e.g. Codes of Practice or Guidelines for municipal and private bodies involved in renting and selling accommodation, and for active support granted to discriminated persons looking for accommodation.
- Point 8 demands measures for sustainable improvement of equal opportunities in a particularly important field, that of education, and for promoting education in mutual tolerance, in respect for human rights and in intercultural dialogue, e.g. by rewarding schools for exemplary anti-racist activities ("Equality School" or "School without Racism").

Nuremberg's activities in implementing the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action"

Nuremberg's city administration has already started to implement the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action" step by step:

1. Human rights education for municipal administration employees, in schools and in adult education institutions

The municipal administration is presently implementing human rights education in schools, in the intercultural in-service training programmes for municipal employees and in adult education institutions.

2. Further measures for the step-by-step implementation of the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action"

In addition, the municipal administration is presently implementing the following measures:

- 2.1 Programme of events for the "International Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination" every year on the 21st of March.
- 2.2 Publication on the topics of racism and discrimination informing city dwellers on their rights and obligations, on protection and legal options, and providing victims and witnesses with contact addresses.
- 2.3 Anti-discrimination rules for municipal contracts and licences.
- 2.4 Guidelines and codes of conduct for real estate companies intended to combat discrimination on the housing market.
- 2.5 Anti-discrimination office within the municipal administration.
- 2.6 Public awards for local companies who actively support the struggle against racism and discrimination.

The organisational structure of the "European Coalition of Cities Against Racism"

For the "European Coalition of Cities Against Racism" to work effectively, it has established an organisational structure comprising a *Steering Committee* which is the decision-making body; an *Administrative Secretariat* whose activities are carried out by the City of Nuremberg Human Rights Office; and a *Scientific Secretariat* located at UNESCO in Paris.

In 2007, during the Coalition's annual conference it was decided that in November 2007, the Coalition will be established as a registered association and thus given a legal basis, so that this network of cities can develop into a strong municipal coalition fighting racism and discrimination. With this decision we also want to make sure that those cities joining the association will not only sign the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action", but actually implement it thereafter. This is why the association's articles include the following:

"By becoming a member of the Coalition, each member commits to presenting a report on its implementation measures for the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action Against Racism" to the Steering Committee every two years."

This passage is to remind members of the commitment they undertook when joining the Coalition, the commitment of actively implementing the Coalition's goals. For, at the end of the day, this is about the Coalition's credibility.

A mid-term strategic plan for the Coalition

The Coalition's first General Conference was held in Nuremberg in May 2007. The presentation of a medium term strategic plan for the Coalition was one of the most

important points on the conference agenda. This plan is aimed at developing the Coalition further and making it an effective instrument in the struggle against racism and discrimination at a municipal level. It includes the following tasks:

1. to organize symposia, workshops and conferences to proactively promote the sharing of best practice in implementing the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action";
2. to create a website for the Coalition in order to facilitate the communication between the member cities as well as the exchange of experiences and best practice examples;
3. to develop transparent criteria for the evaluation of the implementation of the "Ten-Point-Plan of Action" in the member cities;
4. to identify a member city in each European country which undertakes to promote and co-ordinate the Coalition's activities on a national level; and
5. to develop a proactive public relations strategy aiming at informing about the Coalition's goals and making local authorities in Europe interested in joining this communal network against racism and discrimination.

Final words

Fighting racism, xenophobia and discrimination concerns us all. We can only be effective in this struggle, if we succeed in our societies in strengthening the consensus against any kind of cynical attitude in contempt of human beings. Diversity is a gift, not a threat. This struggle is therefore about creating a mode of living together and enjoying our diversity without fear. We will only achieve this goal if we work together.

Dr. Hans Hesselmann