

The Church and Society Commission welcomes the inauguration of the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency

The Church and Society Commission welcomed the inauguration of the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (on 1 March 2007) which was formerly called the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).

On 28 February 2008, the Justice and Home Affairs Council, after consulting the European Parliament, decided on both the Agency's Multi-Annual Framework (MAF) and the Agreement on Cooperation between FRA and the Council of Europe (CoE). The Agreement between the Agency and CoE establishes regular meetings between both bodies, arranges the exchange of information, and provides for coordination of activities in order to avoid duplication of work.

Multi-Annual Framework covers the first five years of FRA's existence (2007-2012) and determines the thematic areas of the Agency's work:

- racism, xenophobia and related intolerance; discrimination based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and against persons belonging to minorities and any combination of these grounds (multiple discrimination);
- compensation of victims;
- the rights of the child, including the protection of children;
- asylum, immigration and integration of migrants;
- visa and border control;
- participation of EU citizens in the Union's democratic functioning;
- information society and, in particular, respect for private life and protection of personal data; and
- access to efficient and independent justice.

FRA is not empowered to deal with individual complaints, but it can refer people to organisations in each Member State where individuals are given legal advice. These include the "National Equality Bodies" which, according to the EU Racial Equality Directive, provide independent assistance to the victims of discrimination, and the national human rights institutions available in many European countries in order to deal more widely with human rights issues and often also with individual cases.

In its meeting on 6-7 March 2008, the Management Board of the Agency appointed Danish Morten Kjaerum as FRA's first Director. Morten Kjaerum has 23 years of human rights experience and currently directs the Danish Institute for Human Rights. When interviewed by the EP Civil Liberties Committee, Kjaerum assessed FRA as a good instrument to strengthen human rights and explained that according to his vision the Agency should be "highly interactive" with the institutional and civil society networks. Both the Council and the Civil Liberties Committee selected Kjaerum as their first choice for the director. The other candidate was Dario Carminati from Italy. The preparations in view of establishing a Fundamental Rights Forum as a cooperation platform between the Agency and civil society are under way. CSC is involved in the process.

You can access more information on the website of FRA: <http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php>