PRESS STATEMENT

Austerity undermines human rights in Europe

Brussels, 10 December 2013 – On Human Rights Day, ENAR highlights the dire impact of austerity measures on human rights in Europe. Recent reports by the Council of Europe, among others, show that austerity is particularly damaging for the most vulnerable groups in society, including ethnic minorities, migrants, and young people. In a European climate progressively marked by social friction, mass unemployment and poverty, widening gaps between rich and poor, and protectionism, these groups frequently see their basic rights to equal treatment and access to justice undermined.

ENAR reminds European leaders that neglecting human rights and increasing the financial burden on vulnerable individuals and communities result in social alienation and poverty that in turn encourage scapegoating practices, xenophobia and racism. We call for an end to austerity and for a political reorientation towards that which is at the heart of the Europe rebuilt after the Second World War – peace, cooperation, non-discrimination, and human rights and dignity for all.

120 million Europeans are currently living in or at risk of poverty. In France, for instance, 350,000 people fell below the poverty line from 2008 to 2011. Ethnic minorities and migrants are often disproportionately affected by austerity due to the fact that they already face widespread discrimination in society, for instance, in the job market. In the UK, a white applicant is 74% more likely to get a job interview than an ethnic minority applicant when they have exactly the same qualifications. In Spain, budget cuts in health might leave between 500,000 and 700,000 migrants without healthcare. In addition, ethnic minorities are scapegoated for Europe’s problems and frequent targets of far right rhetoric and violence. In the Czech Republic so far this year, there have been over 30 anti-Roma marches. The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and NGOs like ENAR have recorded an increase in hate speech and hate crime against communities like Muslims, Jews, People of African descent, Roma, and migrants throughout Europe, especially after the onset of austerity. Eurobarometer also shows a clear increase in popularity of right wing parties.

ENAR Chair Sarah Isal said: “By giving priority to austerity, Europe’s politicians are sacrificing their human rights obligations. Austerity has led to mass poverty, increasing popularity of far right parties, a rise in hate speech and hate crime, and tensions in communities. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to see financial support and equality promotion for individuals and communities as mere costs rather than as investments in Europe’s future. Europe is home to millions of talents that currently lack the opportunity to thrive, since they are marginalised instead of encouraged and coached into suitable positions in the job market. This is an immense loss that Europe will soon come to regret”.

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Notes to the editor:
1. The European Network Against Racism (ENAR aisbl) stands up against racism and discrimination and advocates for equality and solidarity for all in Europe. We connect local and national anti-racist NGOs
throughout Europe and act as an interface between our member organisations and the European institutions. We voice the concerns of ethnic and religious minorities in European and national policy debates.