

Brussels, 16 March 2023

To the attention of:

Madam Von Der Leyen, President of the European Commission
Madam Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

Dear Madam Presidents,

As the second edition of the Anti-Racism Week is approaching, we are writing to you to inform you of the consistent and persistent defamatory attacks on civil society organisations fighting racism across the EU. In particular, we would like to draw your attention to the statement by François Xavier-Bellamy, an MEP representing France (<https://twitter.com/fxbellamy/status/1628801326082826240>) that includes many misstatements about the EU Anti-Racism and Diversity Week (2023) and the European Network Against Racism, labelling the organisation as ‘radical’. ENAR is the only pan-European anti-racism network that combines advocacy for racial equality and facilitating cooperation among civil society anti-racism actors in Europe.

The video from François Xavier-Bellamy MEP appears to be filmed in the European Parliament, which is detrimental to the reputation of the European Parliament. We are aware that Rule 10 on MEPs conduct says “The conduct of Members shall be characterised by mutual respect and shall be based on the values and principles laid down in the Treaties, and particularly in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Members shall respect Parliament’s dignity and shall not harm its reputation”.¹

The EU Anti-Racism and Diversity Week 2023 is organised by Members of the European Parliament from five different political groups in partnership with European Network Against Racism (ENAR AISBL) and other institutions and organisations. As a longtime partner of the European Commission and the European Parliament in organising events around the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 of March), we aim that the event convenes a European discussion to counter racism, mainstream racial equality and evaluate the ongoing European anti-discrimination agenda in line with European values.

It is deeply concerning that every time we discuss racism and discrimination against all groups, there is a cohort of individuals, including now an MEP, that attempts to undermine the work of civil society and the European Commission and the European Parliament by making incorrect and irrelevant links to radical extremism. We are very concerned that this has become a pattern of practice at EU events on racism, youth and democracy, which go without meaningful accountability or adequate response to protect those affected by it and protect the EU spaces in their diversity. We are also concerned that this is a tactic that is used to redirect the needed attention to addressing structural and institutional racism and maintaining zero sum arguments for political gain.

We point the attention to the European Parliament resolution of 8 March 2022¹ on the shrinking space for civil society in Europe, which takes note of the effect of such practices on shrinking the civic space and threats to human rights defenders in Europe, and the continued scapegoating of organisations working for equality, including racial equality.

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0056_EN.html

We expect that the European Commission and the European Parliament will continue to provide ambitious leadership in the fight against racism, defamation and scapegoating civil society by taking the following measures:

- **Publicly denounce MEPs** for using Parliamentary premises to defame and slander civil society organisations. As Members of the European Parliament will soon enter the election campaign 2024, standards on ethics practices in the European Parliament must be maintained. Current MEPs and those running for the new parliamentary term should express the highest commitment to promote a better culture of inclusivity in the European institutions.
- **Provide assurances that no MEP** will show hate or indulge in defamation during the discussions at Anti-Racism and Diversity Week. Following the Bulgarian MEP Angel Dzhambazki's fascist salute during a rule-of-law debate in Strasbourg in 2022, we are fearful that MEPs will undermine the discussions in Anti-Racism Week in Europe's house of democracy.¹¹ The EC and EP can lead by example by ensuring that the civil society spaces they provide are free from harassment, intimidation and stigmatisation, which requires timely and effective follow-up action.
- **Participate in Anti-Racism and Diversity Week** following the invitation sent to open the session. Anti-Racism Week is envisioned to be a shared platform for institutions, civil society organisations, anti-racist actors, activists to come together and lead on solution-based discussions on the systemic gaps that are necessary to address structural and specific forms of racism in their visible and invisible impacts.

We are living in a time of considerable rising hatred, and we are proud that we have developed an inclusive agenda for this week. These attacks show that our activities are even more necessary. It is critical that EU institutions take action to counter the poison stirring in many of our European democracies and show citizens of the Union that there is no place in Europe or our parliament for racism or neo-fascism.

We express our gratitude for your attention to this matter and extend our warmest regards to you.

Yours sincerely,
Ojeaku Nwabuzo
ENAR Director (Policy, Advocacy and Network Development)
European Network Against Racism

Signed in addition by:

1. #DiasporaVote!
2. Advancing Together
3. Africa Centre Ireland
4. Agora Association
5. Alliance Citoyenne
6. Àltera APS
7. Anti-Racist Forum (ARF)
8. Apna Haq
9. ASOCIACIÓN NACIONAL PRESENCIA GITANA
10. Association for Integration and Migration
11. Association for Monitoring Equal Rights (Eşit Haklar İçin İzleme Derneği)
12. Associazione Ayiti Chery
13. Associazione La Rosa Roja International – A.RO.RO.
14. Associazione Oltre il Pregiudizio - OilP
15. CCIE
16. Centre for Equality Advancement
17. Coexister France

18. Coordinamento Diaspore In Sardegna – Co.D.I.Sard
19. Czech Helsinki Committee
20. DARE network – Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe
21. Dokustelle Antimuslimischer Rassismus und Islamfeindlichkeit
22. ENORB — European Network On Religion and Belief
23. ENWAD
24. European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)
25. European Forum of Muslim Women, EFOMW
26. European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA)
27. Europaia
28. Friends of the Earth Europe
29. Generation for Change CY
30. Giolli cooperativa sociale
31. Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
32. Greek Forum of Migrants
33. IDPAD Coalition UK
34. Instituto de Asuntos Culturales, España
35. Irish Network Against Racism
36. Ivorian Community of Greece
37. Kif Kif
38. Lallab
39. LE CRAN
40. Lëtz Rise Up
41. Lifelong Learning Platform
42. Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights
43. Migrant Tales
44. Migrant Women Association Malta
45. Muslim Association for Human Rights (AMDEH)
46. Newwomenconnectors
47. NICRE
48. Nosotras Onlus
49. Open Republic Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia - OTWARTA RZECZPOSPOLITA
50. PICUM
51. Protection International
52. SOS Malta
53. Stichting Ocan
54. Subjective Values Foundation
55. The Ligali Organisation / IDPAD (Hackney)
56. VOIS Cyprus
57. Waterford Integration Services, Ireland
58. Zavod KROG/Institute CIRCLE

ⁱ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RULES-9-2021-09-13-RULE-010_EN.html

ⁱⁱ <http://www.errc.org/news/will-real-sanctions-follow-meps-outraged-tweets-over-dzhambazkis-fascist-salute-in-the-european-parliament>