

New Commission, Same Story: Europe’s Security Obsession Overshadows Rights

Brussels, 23 September 2024 – The European Union’s latest policy direction, as revealed in the list of Commissioners-Designate and their mission letters, signals a stark commitment to a “Fortress Europe.” This strategic direction further prioritises defense and security at the expense of social rights and equality, deepening the continent’s internal divisions and marginalising vulnerable communities.

As Europe doubles down on border militarisation and severe immigration controls, it abandons its commitment to human rights and equality. This approach is not only a betrayal of European values but also accelerates the systematic exclusion of racialised communities, migrants, and minorities. Fortress Europe is rising, and with it, the foundations of equality are crumbling.

Equality Fragmented: An Afterthought in the New EU Agenda

One of the clearest signs of Europe’s abandoned commitment to equality is the appointment of a Commissioner, Hadja Lahbib, to oversee a fractured Equality portfolio, lumped together with Crisis Management and Preparedness. The EU’s decision to dilute the equality mandate, disconnecting it from core justice departments, illustrates how low equality ranks on Europe’s list of priorities. Racial equality, particularly, has been pushed to the margins of the political agenda—disjointed, fragmented, and rendered ineffective.

The compartmentalisation of equality policies reflects a broader failure to tackle systemic racism. Rather than confronting the root causes of racial and social injustice, the EU limits its anti-racism efforts to surface issues like hate speech and hate crimes. This narrow focus turns a blind eye to the structural racism within institutions, law enforcement, and public services, allowing inequality to fester and grow.

Fortress Europe: Militarised Borders, Displaced People

On the EU’s newly created Commissioner roles, dedicated to defense and Mediterranean security, Julie Pascoët, ENAR Head of Policy shared: “With the announcement of Von der Leyen’s appointments, we fear that the European Commission continues to turn its back on the EU’s core values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights. By appointing new roles for defense and the Mediterranean, the EU is doubling down on unjust wars and cruel migration policies, disproportionately impacting racialised communities. This would only deepen Europe’s role in tragic pushbacks, deaths at sea, and the spread of systemic racism across and beyond its borders.”

The militarisation of Europe’s borders—backed by the expansion of agencies like FRONTEX—serves to entrench the notion that people on the move are a security threat rather than individuals deserving of compassion and protection. This security-first mentality disproportionately impacts racialised communities, further reinforcing harmful neo-colonial practices. Instead of offering safety, Europe is building walls and fences, leaving those who seek asylum to face exploitation, detention, and even death.

Security Over Social Rights: Europe's Dangerous Gamble

By focusing so heavily on security and defense, Europe risks sacrificing the very social rights and protections that have long been its hallmark. Expanding on security, coupled with a heightened emphasis on counterterrorism and border control, redirects resources away from critical social policies. Investments in education, healthcare, and social services—fundamental pillars for preventing inequality and injustice—are overshadowed by Europe's obsession with security.

Fortress Europe's approach does not ensure safety; it undermines it. This security-centric strategy threatens to fracture society by over-policing and marginalising racialised communities, perpetuating cycles of discrimination, exclusion, and violence. The EU's failure to integrate preventive social measures into its governance will exacerbate the inequalities it claims to fight.

A Call to Action: Rebuild Equality at the Core

The European Network Against Racism calls on the European Commission's leadership to reconsider its dangerous path and put equality back at the heart of its mission. The equality portfolio must be restored and strengthened with a dedicated Directorate-General, equipped with real power to combat racial and social inequality. The European Parliament must intervene to ensure that the EU's focus on security does not eclipse its commitment to human dignity and justice.

If the EU is to remain a union built on shared values of equality, justice, and human rights, it must resist becoming a fortress. Policies that dehumanise migrants and fracture the equality agenda will lead to greater division and instability within Europe's borders. The future of Europe depends on policies that uplift all communities, particularly those most marginalised by systemic racism and social exclusion.

“Effectively, the European continues to whitewash its complicity in the inhumane treatment of racialised lives by claiming to be a Union of Equality. We need less words and more actions. If the EU recognises that its future relies on making equality and justice central to its mission, it should give more power to the Commissioner for Equality and treat Justice and Home Affairs as a way to protect and serve all communities, especially the most marginalised, including people on the move,” concluded Kim Smouter, ENAR Executive Director.

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Notes to editors: The European Network Against Racism (ENAR aisbl) stands against racism and discrimination and advocates equality and solidarity for all in Europe. We connect local and national anti-racist NGOs throughout Europe and voice the concerns of ethnic and religious minorities in European and national policy debate