

10 Years of National Council for Combating Discrimination

am 06.06.2012

Official Openning and Introduction

- Es gilt das gesprochene Wort -

BEGRÜSSUNG

Excellencies, Dear Mr. Asztalos, Dear Mr. Geissler, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As head of the German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency I am delighted to congratulate the Federal National Council for Combating Discrimination to its 10th anniversary! I gladly accepted your invitation and I am happy to be here.

Please allow me to address to you a few words about combating discrimination by means of an open and inclusive society and by the work of the Anti-Discrimination Agency, which I lead since early 2010.

The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency is an independent equality body. It has been established in 2006 and has a mandate to reduce discrimination in Germany.

We offer counseling for people who have suffered discrimination and we undertake numerous projects to raise public awareness against discrimination.

My colleague Alexander Sopp will inform you later about the structure and functions of the Anti-Discrimination Agency and the General Equal Treatment Act in more detail.

But as for my part I would like to inform you about our pilot projects. Maybe this could give you some suggestions and ideas for your future work.

Six months ago I launched the "Campaign for a discrimination-free society."

What is it about?

Two ideas guide us:

Those who have faced discrimination should be aware of their rights.

And who faced discrimination, needs help.

This, however, the Anti-Discrimination Agency alone can not provide for all the people in our country. Therefore we need strong partners.

The campaign consists of three components:

First, we want a comprehensive network of counseling centers in Germany.

So far, there are still many blank spots in the consulting area, especially outside the big cities.

We therefore encourage with 1.2 million € the formation of "networks against discrimination", which give counseling and advice to all aspects of the General Equal Treatment Act.

Also, existing counseling services are provided with financial support for their work.

Second, we are actively looking for allies.

The support of stakeholders and the fight against discrimination require a strong commitment at the country level and in local communities.

For this I launched the "Coalition against Discrimination".

To raise awareness against discrimination, we have to bring Federal, state and local

governments together. Only on that condition we can achieve that more people get to know their rights on protection against discrimination. And only by joint efforts we can degrade prejudices and discriminatory structures.

So the anti-discrimination Agency could allure provinces and municipalities as partners for the campaign for a discrimination-free society and to advocate with them strongly against discrimination.

Our goal is clear:

We must vehemently oppose discrimination wherever it occurs, whether in the workplace, in the area of goods and services or just in the midst of society.

And we need to actively promote diversity.

So thirdly, we have carried out the project of diversity mainstreaming for administrations.

Together with partners from state administrations and municipalities, the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency carried out the project "Equal Opportunities - Diversity mainstreaming for administrations" from

November 2010 to December 2011.

The aim was to assist states and municipalities in the optimal implementation and further development of protection against discrimination and equal opportunities. The project consisted of two main components:

First: Research on mainstreaming of equal opportunities in and through administrations

Second: A series of workshops for administrative staff from state governments and municipalities.

Promoting diversity always sounds good, but it is easier said than done.

To implement equal opportunities and equal treatment in fact, is still a great challenge for our society.

But let me draw your attention from the administration to the economy.

It is no longer a question of whether a well-functioning market economy needs diversity. Diversity management is now de rigueur. It is part of every good business and communication

strategy, and is highlighted honorably in the self-presentation of companies.

However, anti-discrimination, as required by the directives of the European Union to all member states, is still a red rag to many employers. This is the case in Germany and probably also in Romania.

The issue is still being understood as legislative restricts of the freedom of the employer by burdening him with bans.

That is a shame. Protection against discrimination is a civil right that suits every country. For the international competition we have to assume the standards of successful immigration-countries.

But above all, diversity management accompanies anti-discrimination. This is the next step: to keep an eye on anti-discrimination means setting basic rules for interacting with each other, especially when tolerance and understanding of other people is difficult.

Even if you have even the best diversity strategies - if you do not establish clear rules and provide your employees with protection against

discrimination in their workplace, even the most successful diversity won't help.

But prohibitions alone will also not help. The reduction of prejudices, the changes in attitudes and perceptions are a long process. We have to live diversity – and especially learn to deal with it.

But how do we manage that equal opportunities and diversity in teams do not remain only lip service?

And what is necessary in order to transform responsibility into implementation?

To answer this, there are 2 possible strategies:

First, we need sufficient incentives for implementation. Also as I see the human rights approach being very important, experience shows that more than moral appeals is necessary to make changes.

Employers should become aware of why they shall replace their habits and explore new avenues. There are fortunately many good arguments. Thus, diversity is much more than a beautiful image in a pluralistic society.

And secondly, we need models and examples that show how it can work out.

But let us examine first the incentives, the question "Why diversity?"

An important argument is the demographic change. At the moment in Germany, every fifth citizen is in an old age - the German population is among of the oldest in the world. And the average age also rises in Romania.

Added to this is another challenge in Romania: Studies of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) show, that together with the aging of the population the emigration may compel Romania to recruit workers from abroad.

In this case the country is facing significant challenges, starting with the fact that the outflow of workers must be stopped and reversed. And measures must be developed to cope with the inclusion and integration of large numbers of immigrants.

As there was no immigration of larger scale in Romania, both the authorities and society as a whole face serious challenges in integrating a

large number of immigrants and in dealing with an increasing diversity. The National Migration Plan of Romania contains in this respect some more general strategies. Thus, for example, the experiences of other EU Member States shall be included.

We urgently need awareness - not only in the workplace, but generally seeing - that diversity is a critical factor for success.

Teams which men and women, old and young, natives and immigrants come together in, work demonstrably better.

In the development of non-discriminatory organizational structures and cultures are at the same time also many opportunities. Workers who work in a discrimination-free work environment, in a culture of recognition and appreciation, are more productive, more motivated, more creative and often less sick. They can bring in their individual talents and potentials and develop themselves better. Image and reputation of companies and organizations can thus be improved and the access to new human resources pools will be increased.

And even more: A discrimination-free environment may probably help probably to reduce emigration and labor migration.

In Europe we often face a widespread intolerance

especially from younger people. In fact, according to a recent survey by the George Soros' Open Society Foundations, Teenagers in Romania are widely intolerant of Roma, gays and people with AIDS. The organizers of the survey called the results "extremely worrisome."

This also makes me sad. And I wonder how many highly skilled workers already might have left Romania because of an intolerant society?

Let me therefore tell you about a project of the Federal anti-discrimination Agency that could help at least for the area of employment:

One way to combat the conscious or unconscious discrimination against certain groups of people are depersonalized application procedures.

At first nationwide pilot project on depersonalized application procedures had taken part in the period from November 2010 to December 2011.

Five companies and three public sector employers took part. 246 positions were filled, more than 8550 applicants have applied anonymously.

Compared with conventional application methods, there was proven evidence that women

could particularly benefit from anonymous application process. This applies for example to younger women who have professional experience and due to a possible desire to have children had less chances up till now.

For applicants with an immigration background holds the following: As they have been less likely invited, these persons' chances to be invited have improved after the introduction of depersonalized application procedures.

The assessment of HR departments in charge of the pilot project was positive. The lack of personal information in the application documents, such as name, gender, age and marital status provided was for the majority of HR managers no problem. Many participants noted positively that the introduction of depersonalized application procedures had started a discussion of current recruitment practices in their companies.

Depersonalization takes effects. It establishes equal opportunity and provides a fair application procedure. And more and more companies and recruiters are now beginning to rethink their current, traditional approach. That's a good sign for a new job culture.

Nevertheless could the fight against

discrimination not only be a national affair.

Even by European legal foundations, the anti-discrimination directives of the European Union, we as the equality bodies are connected. I have read with pleasure that Romania's anti-discrimination law covers the grounds of discrimination mentioned in the directives and furthermore other grounds. That some forms of discrimination are even punishable, is remarkable.

I am particularly pleased that the Romanian law protects against discrimination on grounds of chronic diseases. This is what I have claimed for the German law where the protection is at least disputed controvertibly.

And it makes me envious that you can take action on your own initiative and impose sanctions.

So I am pleased to congratulate you as an ambitious and well-equipped partner organization. I hope that some of the projects of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency might also be of interest for you. And maybe they can also bring progress in terms of equality in Romania.

Let me close with this appeal: Equality must arrive in the midst of society!

I thank you once again for my invitation and wish all of us a successful and informative day.

Thank you very much!

<http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/dossier-migration/57795/rumaenien>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/13/romania-racism-teens-n-848747.html>