



European Association
of
Free Thought

Building a Europe of freedoms, fairness and solidarity

EU anti racism action plan – position paper.

Executive summary.

1. Common humanity: rejecting fragmentation.

At the heart of our commitment is the conviction that there is only one humanity, beyond differences in skin colour, nationality, culture, religion, gender or sexual orientation. The concept of ‘race’, which has no scientific basis, should not shape public policy. We regret that the European action plan gives central importance to this vague notion, which risks fuelling artificial divisions and providing inadequate responses to the real challenges of equality.

2. Social community: promoting mutual enrichment.

Human beings are fundamentally social creatures: the richness of our societies lies in the diversity and quality of our relationships. To ensure peaceful relations, we must seek consensus based on recognition of our differences, but also our similarities. We warn against the rise of identity essentialisation, which, far from promoting harmonious coexistence, engenders ‘murderous identities’ (Amin Maalouf) and threatens social cohesion.

Certain excesses, such as the denunciation of “cultural appropriation”, run counter to mutual enrichment: prohibiting artists from other cultures from appropriating universal works would be absurd and impoverishing. Nor can collective memory be erased at will: tearing down statues or rewriting history does not solve discrimination, but risks fuelling resentment and misunderstanding. Honest and nuanced remembrance work is essential.

3. Individuation: defending equality in diversity.

Policy must enable everyone to assert their individuality and develop their abilities without harming others. However, the European action plan places excessive emphasis on intersectionality, inspired by Judith Butler and French Theory. While it cannot be denied that some people face multiple forms of discrimination, the proliferation of particularist demands risks fragmenting society and transforming the “right to difference” into “difference in rights”, to the detriment of equality and social cohesion.

Far from bringing people together, intersectionality tends to pit minorities against each other and multiply the grounds for indignation, sometimes for trivial reasons. This logic leads to an inflation of identity-based demands, which ultimately undermines social cohesion and the effectiveness of the fight against real discrimination.

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4. Controlled opposition: ensuring democratic debate.

Conflict and differences of opinion are inherent in any living society. But they must be expressed within the framework of mutual respect and open debate. We denounce the excesses of ‘cancel culture’ and the temptation to censor any opinion that displeases a group, however small it may be. There is no such thing as the right not to be offended: the response to criticism is argument, not censorship.

Equating criticism of a religion with racism, particularly through the term ‘Islamophobia’, is a dangerous confusion: freedom of conscience and expression implies the right to criticise all beliefs. Religious freedom, as recalled in Article 9 of the ECHR, must be reconciled with the general interest and cannot be absolute.

The European Free Thought Association (AEPL-EU), a partner of the European Union within the framework of Article 17 of the TFEU, which organizes dialogue between the European institutions and religious, philosophical and non-confessional organizations, has obviously a duty to contribute to the reflection that should lead the institutions to draw up a plan to combat racism for the years 2026 to 2030.

We will do so according to four principles that guide our action and are inspired by the Convivialist Manifesto.

1. Principle of common humanity : beyond differences of skin color, nationality, language, culture, religion or wealth, gender or sexual orientation, there is only one humanity, which must be respected in the person of each of its members.

As we know, there is no scientific basis for the concept of race, which would justify ranking individuals according to their origin or appearance. We therefore regret the tendency of the document *A Union of Equality: EU Action Plan against Racism 2020-2025*¹ to put a concept with vague foundations at the service of too many subjects.

If the concept of race has no scientific reality, this means that anything described as racism is based on political criteria or social fashions. Using such criteria doesn't necessarily mean that the problems we're trying to solve don't exist, but that the concept we're using may not be the most appropriate one, and doesn't necessarily provide the answers we need to combat these inequalities.

2. Principle of common sociality : human beings are social beings for whom the greatest wealth is the wealth of their social relationships.

By virtue of this principle, we are obliged to insist that peaceful social relations request necessarily a minimum of consensus. Human relations, while enriched by differences, also require the recognition of similarities. Today, however, we are witnessing a rise in the valorization of identities and their essentialization. We find ourselves increasingly confronted with what Amin MAALOUF calls "*murderous identities*"², which distance us from the *common decency* that should be the cement of our societies.

Some radical movements go so far as to criticize - in the name, we believe, of a misguided vision of anti-racism - what they describe as *cultural appropriation*. If the fight against racism were to continue along this path, we would no longer be able to see Asian musicians playing Mozart or Bizet, or African singers singing Wagner. EU recommendations should denounce

¹ Commission européenne, « *Une Union de l'égalité : plan d'action de l'UE contre le racisme 2020-2025* », COM(2020) 565 final, Bruxelles, 2020.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0565>

² Amin Maalouf, « *Les identités meurtrières* », Paris, Grasset, 1998.

this kind of nonsense. If human beings are social animals and part of a common humanity, then cultural borrowings, even when adapted to a new context, are an enrichment and not an attack on identity.

Common sociality cannot wipe the slate clean. There can be no community without history and heritage. We would therefore warn against a more and more widespread temptation which consists of erasing from the environment or from books the traces of what seems to bother one group or another. Knowing history does not mean endorsing all the things that we today consider to be negative, unpleasant or wrong.

We welcome the recommendation in the afore mentioned Commission's Communication about the importance of studying the history of the roots of racism. However, we would caution that this work must be as objective as possible. The scandal of the triangular trade between Europe, Africa and the Americas should be denounced, but all those involved, including the non-European partners must also be held accountable. Slavery is not limited to this example; it was a common practice between Africa and Arabia or between Africans, and must also be studied in its economic aspects³.

This work of remembrance is often carried out without nuance and its most caricatured manifestations, such as the unbolting of statues, lead to a phenomenon of psychological reactance among uninformed citizens. Removing the statue of Colbert does not correct existing discrimination, but it does prevent the support of people who feel that a figure from their heritage is being tampered with for reasons that do not convince them.

We also regret that neither the communication nor the 2024 evaluation report mention the slightest suggestion for action to eliminate slavery in places where it is still practiced outside Europe.

3. Principle of individuation : in compliance with these first two principles, a legitimate policy is one that enables each person to assert their own individuality as best they can, by developing their capabilities, their power to be and to act without harming that of others, in the perspective of equal freedom.

In our view, the 2020-2025 document gives too much space to the notion of intersectionality. It emphasizes that *'In addition to religion or belief, racism can also be combined with discrimination or hatred on other grounds, including gender, sexual orientation, age and disability, or targeted at migrants. This is something that needs to be taken into account as part of an intersectional approach'*.

This vision, which is inspired by the ideas of Judith Butler⁴ and *French Theory*, makes light of the many criticisms levelled at it and the many abuses that have occurred since it came to occupy a prominent place in public debate.

³ ISMARD, P. dir., *Les mondes de l'esclavage, une histoire comparée*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2021.

⁴ Judith Butler, « *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* », New York, Routledge, 1990.

We do not dispute the fact that individuals can accumulate difficulties and suffer discrimination for reasons that add up. But what we are criticizing today is that the response to discrimination is being jeopardized by the explosion of claims based on particularisms of all kinds.

Paradoxically, the right to be different, taken to extremes, leads to a difference in rights, which puts our our ability to live together in danger.

The EU institutions need to challenge this ready-made thinking.

In practice, intersectionality operates according to what some call the ‘*Law of Conservation of Indignation*’. The more international, European or national institutions try to eradicate inequalities (which is undeniable when you look at the last fifty years), the more we see small groups of activists looking for other reasons to be indignant about causes that some might find anecdotal,

Contrary to popular opinion, intersectionality does not unite people against inequality or discrimination. Rather, it aims to bring together demands - which are not necessarily illegitimate per se - but which often end up clashing, sometimes violently.

In many countries, major advances have been made in the rights of homosexuals, which in the past were the subject of scandalous violations. It has to be said that these advances, which we welcome, are now competing with demands for ever more specific minorities. From defending the rights of individuals who identify themselves as LBG, we have been reduced to using acronyms such as LBGTO, to which a + sign must be added to ensure that we are sacrificing ourselves to the dogma of inclusivity.

If, according to the values we defend, everyone obviously has the right to define themselves in terms of gender or sexual choices, this respect for diversity should not lead to excesses such as those currently experienced by the feminist movement, or force the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom to point out that, while gender is a concept to be taken into account and related discrimination combated, the biological sex of individuals is an indisputable reality.

4. Principle of controlled opposition: because everyone has a vocation to manifest their singular individuality, it is natural for humans to oppose each other. But it is only legitimate for them to do so as long as this does not endanger the framework of common sociality that makes this rivalry fruitful and non-destructive. Good politics is therefore that which allows human beings to differentiate themselves by accepting and controlling conflict.

A characteristic of liberal democracies is that, in politics and in the rules of life, they renounce the idea of embodying an absolute truth. A democratic society must therefore do its utmost to allow contradictory debate, provided it is respectful.

We cannot hope to combat racism and discrimination by tolerating, for example, the practice of cancelling that has gradually taken hold in certain sectors of society and, worryingly, in the academic world.

Nor can we hope to appease a society by equating concepts that have nothing to do with racism. This is particularly the case with the increasingly frequent - and erroneous - use of the term Islamophobia⁵, which we would like to see removed from EU documents.

Attacks on churches or mosques must be unreservedly condemned in the name of the freedom to practise one's religion. But the use of the term Islamophobia is inappropriate in all cases. Islam, the world's third-largest religion, is neither a race nor an ethnic group.

Criticism of religions, whatever their nature, is a right, and a condemnation of alleged Islamophobia cannot bring back by the back door the notion of blasphemy, which has been eliminated from most European legislation. If Pierre converts tomorrow, he is less likely to suffer discrimination than his neighbour Karim if Karim becomes an atheist.

We must also be concerned about the increase in negative reactions to any opinion expressed that displeases a group, however small. But let's not forget that there is no such thing as the right not to be offended. The response to criticism or caricature is not censorship, but reasoned debate. Epidermal reactions, sometimes relayed too complacently by the media and social networks, contribute to the establishment of a dictatorship of minorities that threatens democracy.

The most radical religious groups, for their part, tend to make religious freedom absolute, forgetting that Article 9 of the ECHR clearly states that this freedom can be regulated to ensure respect for the general interest.

On behalf of the Board
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President AEPL

The main objectives of the European Free Thought Association are to support the European project and to promote humanist values, fundamental rights, the rule of law and secularism in Europe. It is totally independent, financed by membership fees from around 2,000 members in some twenty EU countries.

⁵ PENA-RUIZ, H., *Lutter contre le racisme antimusulman, oui ; le nommer islamophobie, non*. 2025
<https://www.marianne.net/agora/humeurs/henri-pena-ruiz-lutter-contre-le-racisme-antimusulman-oui-le-nommer-islamophobie-non>