Anti-racism and EU institutions

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Abstract

This paper considers the agenda-setting strategies of the anti-racist advocacy coalition operating at the EU level. It examines how decision-making takes place in the area of anti-racism regulation in EU institutions. It analyses the role of different concepts of anti-racism and their implications in the policy process. Data was drawn from observation, personal interviews, and analysis of archival materials.

I suggest that policy-making emerges from a fragmented coalition of NGOs, politicians and civil servants operating in connected but distinct regulative environments. Across the different sectors involved in the policy process, various conceptions of anti-racism operate. The concept of mainstreaming of anti-racism acts as the dominant condensing metaphor that guides most agenda-setting attempts and regulatory discourse. But other definitions of the nature, causes and ideal solutions of racism co-exist. All together these conceptions give identity and professionalism to the relevant policy network, but in a fragmented and contested fashion.
In recent years, racism has again emerged as an important issue in the political debate in Europe. The new article 13 of the Amsterdam treaty legitimating EU-level action to combat various forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, reflects the growing importance that this subject is acquiring in Europe. Controversially expanding EU competencies, this article advances the social dimension of the EU. Advocates of the regulation of race relations at the EU-level have argued that an EU anti-racist policy is necessary for a number of reasons. It is appropriate because freedom from racial discrimination is a human right akin to the other human rights tackled by international organisations. But it also appropriate because racism is an issue associated with the role of the increasing number of migrants in European labour markets. In a more integrated European labour market, and with a rising number of non-white and non-EU-citizen minorities, racism also constitutes an economic obstacle. Third World nationals have an inferior status to EU nationals. In this situation, racism can and often does become an acute problem in relation to access to labour markets, employment retention and work conditions. Thus race is now part of a set of social issues that the completion of the market and enlargement may well accentuate (Favell 1998).

Yet, as I will argue, the European-level response to racism has arrived late, and it is weak. In this article I shall explore the operating modalities of the advocacy coalition that has put anti-racism on the agenda, and also the reasons for this weakness. I will examine the limitations to the agenda-setting efforts of a complex coalition of activists and bureaucrats, which has attempted to achieve a stronger policy response. I will explore its modes of operation and likely prospects, as well as examining their promotional role and their responses to the initiatives approved until now. This examination will allow putting into proper context the emerging policy process of anti-racism that article 13 has jump-started.

Article 13 emerges as the outcome of pressure exerted by a composite advocacy coalition, which in Brussels included a variety of institutional actors and networks of NGOs. Several public-interest lobbies and social movement organisations address the EU institutional context. Prominent, in addition to environmentalists, there is a set of social movements concerned with social inclusion that are the most committed supporters of a European role in combating social exclusion and discrimination. They range from organisations of the women’s movement, the anti-racist movement and the disability-rights movement to movement-related concerns whose representation falls somewhere in between an NGO and a movement of the kind which represents the elderly, defends civil liberties, acts against homelessness, or poverty, or on behalf of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, where a range of political parties, NGOs, movements organisations and churches collaborate. Then there are lobbies of movements that are generously supported, if not created by, EU institutions, even when their networks do not have the same depth of representation, such as the consumer-rights movement. All these groups are the focus of attention and resources by EU institutions anxious to create a social counterpart to the dominance of organised business interests. Yet in the name of subsidiarity, there also emerges substantial resistance to an expansion of EU competence in areas that are frequently seen as best left to member states. As I will argue, this ambivalence is one central obstacle that advocates of anti-racism have encountered. Any optimism resting in the soon-to-be-created legal base for anti-racist initiatives needs to be tempered by an awareness of the strong resistance of several member states. But in examining the interaction of the different components of the anti-racist lobby, I will also argue that their project is hindered by contrasting ways of framing issues of race, and by the wide array of allegiances of anti-racists to different social groups. This confuses and disperses their efforts. In addition, I will show that certain ways of understanding anti-racism are selected by policy-makers over other ways that would be preferable to relevant parts of the anti-racist movement.

**Background of anti-racist movements**

In recent years, geopolitical factors such as increased migration rates in several EU countries, and the process of European integration - which makes borders more permeable, and regional economic recessions - have made issues of territorial belonging...
newly relevant in the EU. In this context, movements have emerged that re-emphasised a sense of nationhood in terms of issues of political representation. A right-wing populism rooted in perceptions of ethnic community has sparked a rise of the extreme right in several EU countries, a concern for attacks on migrants and an increased presence of themes of racial identity in the press. Hence ethnicity in the context of the European integration of historical nation states has emerged as a crucial theme in the public arena. The right-wing reactive social movements and parties that have emerged in several areas have also placed the issue of regulation of race relations on the agenda of countries where there is a vacuum in this policy area. In the wake of migratory fluxes nationalist movements dwell on themes related to community membership, and thus often articulate issues of citizenship and community. Counter movements - anti-racist movements - which reject claims of a common enemy, and the idealisation of the nation as a cohesive community, oppose them. The cultural exchanges between the two types of movement reflect debates taking place in public discourse and, in turn, influence these debates. As the expression of anti-immigrant sentiments and coded racist sentiments has become more frequent, the rejection of those sentiments has also become visible. A new bloc of anti-racists has emerged in several EU countries. It grew out of smaller migrant associations and turned into a counter-movement against attacks. But in recent years it has expanded and taken root in the previously unaffected countries of Southern Europe as an independent movement with original initiatives. It is a movement that, in addition to protesting against the mistreatment of racial minorities and migrants, also promotes an ideal of tolerance and multiculturalism and is an independent voice in public discussion of the nature of the new integrated Europe.

There is in Europe a long-standing history of anti-racist mobilisations that exert their efforts in a variety of ways, in protest actions or within institutional domains. I will refer to them broadly as ‘anti-racist movements’, aware, however, that they employ widely different forms of pressure, some disruptive, some not, but with a view to stressing an empirical continuity of people and purposes. The nature of this movement is difficult to define as anti-racist protest events have occurred in a variety of contexts, within a time frame that was not unified by clear geopolitical episodes such as the Cruise missile crises or the Chernobyl incident. The UK is an exception in Europe, as it is the country that for the longest time had a robust and diverse anti-racist movement.

Typical of the UK’s mobilisations are those witnessed during the seventies and eighties, when tensions rose in certain inner-city settings, leading to what were called “race riots”. Also typical of the UK are anti-racist movement lodged in institutions of the public sector, particularly educational establishments (Bonnett 1993). But anti-racist movements have also emerged early, although not as prominently in France, where groups such as SOS Racisme have for many years been supported by the Socialist Party.

Anti-racism is a movement frequently described as in a state of crisis and self doubt (Bonnet 1993, Lloyd 1994). At the ideological level, some have argued that anti-racism should be a set of dimensions of the multifarious and changing identity of various ethnic groups, connected to their religious and cultural identities. Others have privileged a cohesive political identity whereby the anti-racist struggle takes place in

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1 There is a debate in the literature on the distinction between social movements and public pressure lobbies. Some authors believe they should be differentiated, others do not. Empirically, and as I will show in the anti-racist field, they are often connected. In my research on the anti-racist movement, as well in a similar study I conducted on environmentalism (Ruzza 1996), the people involved in what I call movement-related lobbies have often previously been engaged or were also currently engaged in protest events.
association or is even super-ordinate to class and gender conflict. A further division has often emerged between minorities and ‘white’ anti-racist activists, with some arguing that anti-racists should let minorities speak for themselves and others advocating a broader and more inclusive movement. That is, a movement of people from different backgrounds who face issues of racism in their everyday professional and social lives, such as educationalists and other professionals. There are also those who see education of the public at large as the main goal of anti-racism, and they are criticised for only concerning themselves with the white majority (Gilroy 1987). This split is connected with a contested identification of the source of racism, with some focusing on individual dispositions and others on institutional procedures (Ben-Tovim 1997: 219). In institutional settings, particularly in UK schools and local authorities, but also among social workers, probation officers, and social-security officials, there has been a difference concerning what should be at the focus of attention: racism or multiculturalism (Ben-Tovim 1997). Externally, there have been attacks by the popular press on the ideology of anti-racism, which has been associated with the traditional left and with what the press has regarded as a culture of intolerance within the movement. These issues have also been addressed by movement analysts and advocates (Gilroy 1990).

However, in the UK, as in other EU countries, anti-racist movements have revived somewhat from the internal divisions and interpretative self-doubt of the early nineties. A response to racial attacks newly united them, strengthening their counter-movement character and re-invigorating older counter-movement organisations such as the Anti-Nazi League in the UK (originally formed in 1977). This counter-movement character has been conducive to the formation of broad alliances, but as it will be seen, not of cohesive framings.

Anti-nazi anti-racism has also emerged in delimited contexts such as in football. There are co-ordinated national campaigns such as the ‘Show Racism The Red Card’ initiative in football, which have recently been successful (See Merkel and Tokarski 1996). And there are broad-ranging anti-racist groups such as “SOS Racisme” in France. All the mobilisation episodes have attracted support from a variety of organisations not directly connected in organising them, many engaged in other causes. For this reason, the identity of the anti-racist movement is somewhat difficult to define. Yet there are in Europe a large number of anti-racist organisations, some national, many local, that constitute the background of the anti-racist movement active in EU institutions. It is a movement that varies significantly in terms of tactics, scope of operation, areas of specific concern. It ranges from the militant British Anti-Nazi League to special concerns such as Austrian groups opposed to discrimination against the Romanies and Travellers, to more institutional groups such as the European Council of Refugees and Exiles. This broad movement is unified by a principled aversion to social exclusion.

The literature on anti-racism in the EU

Although racial intolerance has been broadly covered by the European media, the specific academic literature is limited; as well, the coverage of racist movements is more extensive than that on anti-racist mobilisations. Whilst there is abundant early work on race and migration issues in the UK - which also include studies of anti-racism (see for instance Gilroy 1990, Bonnett 1993) – the work done in other EU countries is limited (see for instance Silvermann 1991 and Wrench and Solomos 1993 for a review). The area of anti-racism is particularly lacking comparative studies and EU-level studies. Lloyd (in Wrench and Solomos 1993) analyses the reasons for these lacunae, and points to the vastly different legal regulation of the issue of ‘race-relations’ in different countries, to academic traditions that frame race and migration issues very differently, and to linguistic and cultural difficulties as obstacles to comparative work.
These differences include the difficulty in socially locating racism, that is, identifying the institutions where racism needs to be tackled, its causes and the appropriate methods for combating it. The frequently made identification of racism as a common problem of both migrant groups and the ‘ethnic’ underclass might be misleading. This is because, as Heisler (1991) points out, migrants in Europe have high participation rates in labour markets and are generally effective in forming their own political and social organisations, which I will later show have effective EU-level representation. Thus efforts to address racism against the underclass and against migrants may well take different forms that should therefore be addressed by different policies. Awareness of these differences is beginning to permeate policy-making in EU institutions, but these differences are also at the roots of the difficulties of the anti-racist movement and possibly its arguably insufficient visibility. As Wrench (in Wrench and Solomos 1993: 12-13) says, there is often a denial that racial and ethnic inequality is pervasive in European society and confusion about the link between EU and national policy-making in combating racism, as well as about the role of anti-discrimination legislation. This, however, does not imply that anti-racism as a goal is not generally accepted. In fact, as activists report, anti-racism is valued more often in societies that have been only marginally affected by race conflict. For these societies, both racism and anti-racism are relatively new phenomena and a social reflection on the nature and implication of racism is still in its infancy.

But in countries where there is a tradition of anti-racist mobilisation it has become clear that beyond its reactive character, the movement is fundamentally divided ideologically between assimilative and multiculturalist strategies (Modood 1997).

**Framing anti-racism: migration, race and social exclusion**

As with other social movement frames such as ‘environmental sustainability’, ‘anti-racism’ is now an approved societal concern that stimulates discursive institutional compliance. Combating racism is traditionally a defining characteristic of the left and has in recent years received attention in the media and mainstream politics as a reaction to substantial advances of the extreme right in several EU countries. Movement and political party activists working against racism know this broad anti-racist ethos, and attempt to turn into specific cultural and policy initiatives what they perceive as a universally approved declaration of principles, which however can merely result in limited and controversial institutional initiatives. Their work is resisted, re-defined and ignored by a substantial right-wing political coalition. But in EU institutions, anti-racism as an institutionally approved social value has left little space for any relevant inroads of this coalition. The question is whether the present institutional efforts to remedy racism can be considered substantial, adequate or grossly insufficient. Finding an answer to this question is not easy. Some see the glass as half empty and some as half full. But here I will document the consequences of valuing anti-racism as an approved institutional concern.

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2 As the head of the Civil Liberties Committee, Michael Elliott, pointed out, there is virtually universal rejection of extreme right positions in the Parliament.
Generally activists are supportive of EU bodies’ commitment, but their attitude varies from disenchanted scepticism to belief in the personal commitment of institutional actors. Noting the reiteration in EU bodies of anti-racist concerns, one activist said:

> Regulation of racism is a matter of fashion. Everybody says they are concerned about racism. You had the Council of Europe’s campaign, ‘All different all equal’, then the following year was the ‘European Year Against Racism’. Now you hear much more about it on TV and the radio. In the newspapers it has become a fashion. You have to be anti-racist. It is something in the wind.

However, unlike other movements’ concerns, such as ‘environmental sustainability’, ‘anti-racism’ is a less unified cluster of ideas and organisations. It does not have an all-encompassing discursive frame. This is a problem that the movement has tackled with different approaches. Some activists who believe in ‘mainstreaming’ do not see the need for a unifying key concept; others believe that anti-racism has not been correctly framed in Europe. The secretary general of a medium-sized group argued that many problems of anti-racist work in Brussels come from the fact that the issue was incorrectly framed, being seen as connected to migration instead of being resourced by EU institutions and conceptualised by activists independently. However, as a specific anti-racist network is now emerging, he is moderately optimistic for the future. A constitutive conference of a specific ‘European Network against Racism’ (ENAR) was held in October 1998, and the first board meeting took place in December 1998. A staff of four and a venue were selected in the spring of 1999. But the new network is still in its infancy, and the fragmentation of the field persists. As one activist noted:

> Many organisations approach racism as one concern among a set of related concerns and might focus on it for a campaign, but then move on to other topics keeping a more limited reference to it. For instance, the Youth Forum’s main campaign against racism was called ‘All different all equal’, but when it came to an end other themes emerged.

This contextualisation of anti-racism which emerges in the programs of women groups, trade unions, socialist parties and churches embeds anti-racism in the left-liberal family of movements and the mainstream of the European institutional left through its generalised concern with social exclusion. However, this is a very broad movement family with only limited internal ideological cohesion. Each branch of the family can attach anti-racism to their main grievances and re-interpret it as one of their competencies, but often not the main one. Gender and class issues, poverty, migration, human rights, labour disputes, etc. are all seen as affected by racism and all concerned movements’ sectors spend time and energy on anti-racism. If this is an advantage for the anti-racist movement because it makes it globally relevant, it is also a disadvantage because the specific constituency of victims of racism is often too
weak to claim its own discursive space. The issue is tagged-on to the other movements that claim it. This is making it more difficult for anti-racists to maintain relevance.

*Anti-racism and left-libertarian movements*

The anti-racist movement has strong personal and institutional contacts with a variety of other movements concerned with social exclusion. There are a variety of organisations with different tasks and philosophies lobbying EU institutions for legislation and funds. There are a few large and loosely organised networks that encompass a variety of social exclusion causes, such as the Social Platform, Solidar, the Youth Forum, the European Federation for Intercultural Learning, the European Human Rights Foundation, and religious organisations. Solidar, for instance, co-ordinates activities on an EU level on social welfare and aid, and last year engaged in a campaign against racism. The Social Platform co-ordinates about 25 umbrella organisations, each with a number of organisations ranging from a few to several hundreds and whose focus varies with some interested in disability-rights issues, others aging, still others racism. All these organisations have good contacts with EU institutions, and at the same time support protest activities of some of their activist member organisations and the service and welfare activities of other members.

If anti-racism is embedded in other movements, it is also a distinct social movement area with a separate identity and a variety of loosely collaborating organisations directly connected, even if represented in other networks. While some organisations have stressed their anti-racist concerns in recent years, particularly in 1997, which was declared the European Year Against Racism, there are organisations for whom anti-racism is the main concern or a dominant one. The most prominent are the European Migrants’ Forum, Starting Line, the Anti-Poverty Lobby and then to a lesser extent the Youth Forum and the Women’s Lobby. Taken together they express in EU institutions the concerns of a broad European movement of several hundred organisations and unaffiliated individuals. Its Brussels representation, as in the case of the environment, excludes the more radical, small and institutionally peripheral, groups, but includes a wide variety of concerns, philosophical positions, and strategic orientations.

Given so many connections and potential synergism one would expect an influential and successful movements’ environment. But this has not been generally the case. To understand why, one has to consider a variety of issues, which I will discuss after reviewing the role of bureaucratic and political environments, and the social movement organisations. Unlike in other movements, such as the environmental movement, the business sector plays a marginal role and does not merit separate consideration.
EU institutions have played a generalised facilitating role in the establishment of anti-racist movements in Brussels. As previously noted, the role of social movements is important for the Commission and the EP as a consequence of the perceived need for democratic legitimacy of the ‘European Project.’ This point emerges clearly from interviews with Commission officials, who often refer to “the European value added of their operations” in the anti-racism field, and from interviews with activists, who feel they are valued as a way to reach out for an otherwise isolated bureaucracy. In the words of a EYF activist, “The main idea is that as many young people as possible should know that Europe is good for you.” In a Communication from the Commission (by DG XXIII), the importance of voluntary organisations is clearly stressed and the sector is extensively reviewed with a view to increasing their resources and influence. The awareness has permeated all sectors of the bureaucracy and has made an impact on the politicians of the Commission. But there are also broader generational and ideological factors at play behind the close connection between EU institutions and NGOs. One activist said: Activists have very often links that go back to the sixties and the seventies with the people in government. I was able to tell a Commissioner that he was a founder member of one of our organisations. Especially now that there is a social democratic majority in the EU, many ministers were supporters of NGOs.

In addition to sponsoring movements, with regard to racism, the fact that EU bodies have been proactive in their policy initiatives is recognised by activists and by institutional actors of EU bodies. This activism has met with limited results, however; only recently has there been reason for some optimism. The issue of anti-racism appeared formally on the agenda with the EP-produced Evrigenis report of 1986. But as recently as in 1991, Glyn Ford (1992: 87), the former leader of the European Parliamentary Labour Party, noted:

Of the 40 recommendations of the Evrigenis report only a few have been fully implemented so far and none has led to significant changes in anti-racism legislation, nor to action at the Community level to confront and tackle the root causes of racism and xenophobia.

3 Civil servants in considering all policies are obliged to take into account what has been called ‘the European value added’, that is they have to consider whether policies have a positive impact in furthering the process of European integration.

4 Communication from The Commission on Promoting The Role of Voluntary Organisations And Foundations In Europe - DG XXIII, 1995 (en/23/95/00891100.W00/EN). DG VIII also has a document entitled "Digest of Community Resources Available for Financing Activities of NGO’s and other Decentralised Bodies Representing Civil Society in the Fields of Development, Co-Operation and Humanitarian Aid"
The situation began to improve after a commission of independent experts headed by Jean Kahn was set up by a Franco-German initiative and produced in 1996 a report which, amongst other things, recommended the setting up of a European monitoring centre.

In recent years, racism has been receiving increasing attention. As Chopin and Niessen (1998: 18) point out:

There is evidence of willingness among the Union’s institutions to proceed towards effective action. The EP produced the Evrigenis report in 1986 and the Ford report in 1991, and has continued to press for measures, including a directive. The Commission has done everything possible within the constraints of the old treaties: giving some financial support to anti-racist projects, co-operating with the social partners in producing a code of good employment practice against discrimination, sponsoring studies of anti-discrimination laws in member states, and most recently working successfully for the establishment of a Monitoring Centre on Racism, Xenophobia, and to make 1997 the European year against Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism. The Economic and Social Committee has long urged legislative and other measures. The Committee of the Regions has also called for action.

However, despite the variety of initiatives (In addition to Ford 1992, for a more recent summary of initiatives and selected texts see CEU 1997), progress has been slow, hindered by both institutional dynamics and the organisational structure of this policy area. Organisationally, it is a very fragmented policy area, treated in several DGs. Even if connections are generally good at a personal level, the institutional fragmentation is a source of inefficiency; thus some Commission officers have advocated stronger connections.5

Politically, it is a weak policy area, as the EP Ford points out (1992: 88) because it is not sufficient for the Commission to submit documents or initiatives to the Council of Ministers, as the qualified majority rule of this policy area means that initiatives are easily stopped, or the Commission is forced to dilute them substantially, and it becomes questionable whether they can any longer be considered a step forward. Thus institutional actors committed to anti-racism within EU bodies must play a difficult game of assessing where it is reasonable to aim.

This institutional commitment also has a personal dimension. As an activist pointed out6:

The institutions with a mandate on racism collaborate closely. In particular, the relevant sections of the Commission, particularly DGV, and the EP,

5 For instance, at the EP-sponsored conference "Tackling Racism in Football Across Europe" at Manchester United Football Club, 30th January 1998, a DGV official noted that there is a need for different Directorates of the Commission to co-operate more actively.

6 Several informal conversations and set of 20 key-actor interviews with MEPs, Commission officials, and directors and members of networks and were conducted in Brussels in July 1998 and April 1999.
particularly the Committee on civil liberties, collaborate closely. The head of the
relevant unit and some staff go to most of the meetings of this committee,
and there are frequent personal contacts. 7 Relations with movement
representatives and NGOs are also frequent, and were so particularly during
the ‘Year Against Racism.’

Thus, institutional actors, mainly in the EP and the Commission, together with activists in a variety of
NGOs, come to constitute an advocacy coalition. However, an examination of its different components will
show that after article 13 it is now a nascent subsystem (Sabatier 1998: 111) which has yet to coalesce
around a cohesive set of policy beliefs.

The European Parliament

The European Parliament has also been very active. The nature of Parliament is such that
MEPs are free to be involved in anti-racist work or not according to their personal
interests and party alignment. The EP is traditionally high-minded in terms of principles,
possibly because it has little power to implement resolutions, but it also has a high
absenteeism rate and not infrequently an accumulation of tasks at national and EU levels
that force a strict selection of interests. Consequently, there has emerged over the years a
core of institutional activists MEPs with a specific interest in anti-racism, an interest
which, for some, has lasted several years and has involved participation in the committee
that reported on racism in 1986 and in 1991 as well as continuing commitment. They
often work on anti-racist issues, both at the national and at the EU levels, where much
anti-racist policy work is concentrated in the Civil liberties committee and the anti-racist
working group. As one MEP noted, in the successful approval of article 13, the EP played
a fundamental role:

Parliament was very much behind article 13. The parliament has been
pressing for years for a wide ranging anti-discrimination article and we got
nearly everything we wanted… We did not only support it, we were in the
forefront in trying to get the new article incorporated. The parliament had a
lot to do with pushing this all thing along… Now we need to make sure that
the ideas of article 13 are actually effectively enforced. But we can now go
forward.

The same MEP stressed that relevant actors in the EP and the Commission are already working on a new
set of proposals. There are already new Commission initiatives under consideration mainly aimed at
tackling racial discrimination in the labour markets and in education (the EU exchange programs)

Anti-racist parliamentarians have excellent and frequent relations with the anti-racist
organisations in Brussels, although there are more specific ideological affinities. Thus

7 This is also because in DGV there is a tradition that the Commission is represented in parliamentary
committees at Chef’s level.
EYF tends to work mainly with the Socialist group, and particularly with the same few members over several years. And in general all groups have worked more with the left because, as an activist pointed out, welfare and the interventionist role of the state in society is a leftist concept. MEPs often take the initiative in contacting movements’ representatives when they have to be Rapporteurs on issues for which they need information. They establish contacts directly, or through their assistants, or often through the CEU list of contacts.

The Commission

The Commission has been concerned with racism for a long time, but the bureaucratic strength of the field of anti-racism is limited compared to the environmental movement. The main bureaucratic referent for anti-racism is a unit of DGV which as a whole deals with the free movement of workers in the EC - essentially a legal activity (revision of free movement legislation, action on complaints of infringement against member states, etc.). The unit also deals with the social integration of immigrants, employment programs of recognised refugees and action against racism. So the latter is only one of the areas of concern. Activists describe the head of unit as very committed - a “super-converted” - and value her political sense, her ability to be realistic and effective in her demands, and achieve results.

The Unit was created in 1958. It deals with matters such as free movement of labour already included in the Treaty of Rome. Integration of immigrants and refugees came later. Anti-racist policy was added in 1986. There are 20 people employed in the whole unit. The number of people working on racism varies. In late 1998 only one person worked full time on racism and three people half-time. The previous year, however, a few more were added to cope with the extra work connected with the establishment and administration of the ‘European Year against Racism.’ The work for integration of immigrants implied contacting and subsidising NGOs working with migrants or NGOs of migrants and promoting social integration.

At present, within a not large budget, the allocation for racism is the smallest. Refugees have 10 million ECU (MECU), integration of immigrants 6.4 MECUs, action against racism 5 MECUs. In addition there were several budget lines for setting up a monitoring centre for racism and xenophobia in Vienna, but they were terminated after 1998 because it became an independent agency.

The biggest policy initiative of the last few years was the decision to organise the European Year against Racism. Until then the Council argued that there was no legal basis in the Treaties for action against racism, so the establishment of the ‘Year’ has to be considered a success. Building on the successes of the initiative, the Commission adopted in 1998 an action plan on racism (CEU 1998). The establishment of the Agency in Vienna is also a policy success. In the treaty of Amsterdam, an article against discrimination elaborated by the Unit was successfully inserted for the first time. As soon as the treaty is ratified, the Commission has announced that it will propose specific legislation on racial discrimination, and the Unit is already preparing these legislative instruments.

This is not to say that all efforts have been successful. As the head of unit said, she hoped for more money for the European Year. She argues that 4.8 MECUs is not much for the
EU. She would have liked article 13 to allow for majority voting (at present, Council has to be unanimous, and this is a handicap), and she would have liked it to have direct effect (at present, the CEU must make proposals and Council is also involved). Also, the article is within the Free Movement normative and does not articulate a specific political right. In expressing some disappointment, she is reiterating opinions voiced by other institutional activists not only within the commission but within the EP as well, where an MEP said of the measure: “Many of us hoped it would go a great deal further than that.” But she points out that the entire issue is to a significant extent out of the CEU control. She noted that Chancellor Kohl himself took out some words at the last minute, and that when issues are debated between heads of states, issues go well beyond the sphere of influence of a head of unit.

Unfortunately, as the head of unit pointed out, mobility is very high in DGV and is encouraged by the hierarchy, but she points out that racism is a very special field; if a position is posted, only personally committed people tend to apply. They are generally not directly activist, although they might — like the head of unit — be members of Amnesty International or similar organisations. She argues that hiring like-minded experts and consultants in DGV is no longer possible in the present money-conscious climate. She had a couple of ‘auxiliaires’ from the NGOs but they could only be employed for the ‘Year Against Racism’. Over the years, this head of unit has seen her job and her unit changing. It started as a unit dealing with a merely legal set of concerns and is progressively becoming a unit that has built a legal aspect. But is also concerned with “societal aspects of policy” and the budget has gradually increased over the years - a development encouraged at all levels of the hierarchy.

The anti-racist work done by units other than DGV is not dissimilar in being fairly activist in orientation - particularly the work of DGXXII, but also DGXVI, and DGVIII. The ideological orientation is, as with DGV, sustained by a belief in the promotion of Europe, not only for providing legitimacy to EU bodies, but for broader reasons as well. Some activists say that there is in the CEU a fundamental belief that the European model has been an effective social model for many years. It has provided security from wars and affluence, and there is a desire to promote it as a philosophy not just within the EU but outside as well. Hence voluntary organisations such as Youth organisations and their activists’ concerns are funded in places as distant as Georgia or the Maghreb area. And the CEU needs to know about society, and voluntary organisations can provide space for reciprocal knowledge, which range from activists and volunteers brought to Brussels for consultations and represented in Brussels, to EYF staging ‘Youth in Parliament’ events (where 500 young people are brought to Brussels for a two-three day debate on their living conditions with the participation of EU bodies representatives).

The division between an assimilationist and a multiculturalist approach that characterises European anti-racism finds an echo in Brussels. There is uncertainty whether to address racism with the assimilative Jacobin French tradition, or the more multicultural Dutch conception. As Lloyd (1994) points out, the first tradition sees anti-racism as a civil-rights issue connected with the French revolutionary and republican tradition that stresses the equality of citizens before the state, and tackles it with the French model of integration based on a liberal access to nationality and citizenship. This tradition encourages the superseding of differences in a common conception of citizenry.

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8 For an extensive examination of the two traditions see Lloyd 1994.
Conversely, in the UK, the affirmation of a politics of identity has resulted in an emphasis on minority cultures. The first tradition risks subsuming all differences by focusing on the lowest common denominator of the dominant culture, the second risks promoting a proliferation of particularist identities that hinder a unified mobilisation. Lloyd (1994: 237) argues that anti-racist organisations have been unable to overcome the contradiction of universalism/particularism.

In Brussels this contradiction hinders the anti-racist community’s progress towards identifying shared goals, for instance agreement on how to best spend money, where to concentrate efforts, which groups to support. However, according to some activists, the dominant institutional ethos is an assimilationist one, and an assimilationist ethos seems to emerge in interviews with civil servants. For instance, a civil servant stressed that all steps should be taken to actively encourage migrants’ access to ‘majority’ culture, but awareness of migrants’ cultural diversity was never expressly mentioned. Much emphasis is placed on, and funds are spent promoting, minority’ integration. Policy provisions to promote minority cultures and safeguard religious rights are more limited. The two approaches are not easily combined, but their contrast is more of a problem for the unity of the movement at large than for institutional activists. From their small units in Brussels, they can simply espouse a policy of channelling as much in the way of resources as possible to a wide variety of organisations, which might have contrasting aims.

Activists in EU Institutions

Activism within institutions is a significant asset for a movement. The anti-racist movement is significantly represented in the EP without this causing significant conflict of interest for the persons involved. It is less easily expressed in bureaucratic units, such as the Commission, but it is by no means less present or committed.

For instance, in the DGV, as in other units, the purpose of the units concerned with anti-racism also shapes their ideological alignment (Michelmann 1978). But uncovering the extent of institutional activism is not easy as CEU officials are torn between conflicting demands in their self-presentation. On the one hand, institutional activists need to safeguard their legitimacy as professional impartial bureaucrats. On the other hand, they need to show commitment to the ideology of their unit, the taken-for-granted rules operating in that particular environment. So, stressing that racial discrimination is intolerable and needs to be remedied is part of the job. Revealing personal participation in extra-institutional movement activities is done with more caution, however. Yet, in general, the EU civil service in movement-related areas is in principle open to sympathetic observers.

Institutional activism is significant. A civil servant noted that to work well in such a demanding and politicised DG, one has to have personal commitment beyond the call of a civil servant. Institutional activism in the CEU merges the overarching value of European construction with the commitment to the specific ideology of their unit. Thus the same civil servant continued:

What can we at the European level do to add to that which is appealing to the NGOs but which is also appealing to the general public? Our biggest challenge is to reach the general public. Because we reach the converted,
people who are even more convinced than we are, but we have to reach your neighbour.

In this strategy of addressing the concerns of the ‘average European public’, which has meant an attempt to appear reasonable, to choose credible interlocutors, and even to accommodate specific governments’ preferences, the Commission has not infrequently been seen as erring on the side of caution. Yet their commitment is unquestionable.

After the end of the ‘Year Against Racism’, DGV and the relevant NGOs decided to continue a strict collaboration and the Commission encouraged them to co-ordinate their efforts at EU level and to be represented by a co-ordinating structure – the MPG – as it would otherwise not be feasible to consult directly the few thousand EU NGOs of the sector. There was a conference successfully jointly organised by the Commission and the NGOs in 1997 and more are planned.

Speeches of the holder of the most important post in setting the social policy agenda of the Commission - Commissioner Flynn - testify to a personal and institutional commitment to anti-racism: a commitment that an MEP reports to be generally appreciated in Parliament. The social corporatism typical of the EU policy making style was clearly enunciated by Commissioner Flynn, and is seen as encompassing the field of anti-racism:

I see a role for a strong representation of European level. A representation that will complement those which exist for other major social issues such equal opportunities, poverty and disability. … A representation that will enable you to participate in the development of European policy against racism.

The main problem for the Commission is that as in other movements, organisations speak with too many voices. A head of unit said:

There should be a secretariat or a small platform, whatever they want to do, with an agenda. The purpose of having a platform is that they should have one program, decide what they want to accomplish. So that will be our partner for all the activities in the area of racism…. There are thousands of these groups and they should really come together… So this is one reason why the Migrants’ Forum was set up.

NGOs are consulted for a variety of reasons, to gather information, to co-organise events, and occasionally to discuss their financial needs and project proposals (there are over 600 for each call for proposals, so an initial selection is made without consultation)\(^9\). Trust in movement organisations varies significantly. Those with better accounting, punctual

\(^9\) For a list of successful projects funded within the context of the European Year Against Racism and a description of participating organisations see “European Year Against Racism: Directory of Projects - Employment and Social Affairs” EUROP: Brussels 1998.
delivery of reports, and record for accurate research are clearly favoured. On the other hand, the 'good-willing amateurs' are seen as an all too unfortunately frequent encounter. The CEU is also trying to involve trade unions and employers as the workplace is considered a locus of much racial discrimination. The Unions adopted a joint declaration, which was signed by trade unions and employers in 1995, and there is optimism that their role is significant and will grow in the future at EU level.

The social movements

Movements’ Activists are frequently personally and officially engaged, supporting protest activities in their own countries, as well as pursuing initiatives in Brussels. In that role their function varies from the purely legislative lobbying typical of Starting Line (SL) to the mainly consultative function for EU institutions characteristic of the European Migrant Forum (EMF), to a combination of the two roles for particular constituencies, such as women and youth (the women’s lobby EWL and youth forum EYF). They state that protest and lobbying are seen as complementary activities.

Although the number of activists with a general interest in racism is larger than the number with an interest in environmental issues, the number of people with a specific interest in race issues is probably similar - about 15-25 people permanently in Brussels and a larger group of people working occasionally on anti-racism with varying frequency. The precise number is difficult to estimate not only because of the fact that some organisations might focus entirely on racism for several months and then move on to other connected issues, but also because concern with racism is frequently expressed under other labels. For instance, in Europe the majority of recent migrants are non-white. Work on migrants is strictly linked to work on issues of racial discrimination, even when it is not expressly stated.

Several organisations, such as EMF and SL, started to be active in the late eighties and early nineties, and have been substantially helped by the Commission and EP in setting up roots in the EU. Their budget varies greatly because the whole budget or a large proportion of it comes through one-year projects. But it is enough to keep several staff permanently employed and to refund expenses of national activists travelling to Brussels for short periods. The EMF has about six staff and three elected members permanently in Brussels and an executive committee of seven coming several times a year, the SL and the other groups have fewer full time people - often just one or two full time workers and several frequently changing volunteers. There are organisations with general purposes that might have one full-time anti-racist activist in Brussels. For instance, the EWL has one, the EYF which has seventeen full time workers (seven campaigners and ten staff) does not have a specific person, but several activists who have worked on anti-racist issues. Solidar had one person working on anti-racist issues in 1998, and a few working on other projects.

There is in the anti-racist sector a division of labour and affinities for different activism styles. The EMF sees itself as performing a function of co-ordination for anti-racist European social movements. Protest and lobbying are seen as complementary. One activist noted:

10 For instance in recent years SL had a total budget line of about 4.8 MECUs yearly; EMF of 900,000 ECU’s plus two or three large projects (one on justice and policing, the other on women’s economic potentials).
Protest is the job of our base organisations. The Migrant forum is an institution established by other institutions, but it is made up of local groups. This means that if I act within the EMF or the supporting groups it is the same thing. So if any organisations need demonstrations or protests they can ask here to the EMF. For instance, last year (1997) the EMF organised a big conference in the Netherlands with the participation of EU institutions and the Dutch support group. Outside of the conference the supporting group engaged in protests and demonstrations.

Similarly the EYF has organised petitions in parallel with their lobbying action. For instance, in 1997 there was a campaign to ‘end exclusion’ with a petition. Conversely, SL sees its role as exclusively as lobbying EU institutions, but admits that its members are activists on a personal level and as such engage in protest events. They consider groups such as EMF as somewhat too close to EU institutions, or even “a creation of the EU” but are in principle not opposed to collaboration with them. A somewhat more cautious relation exists between churches and other groups. There are potential conflicts of interest and philosophical differences between those who see a stronger role for state intervention to curb racism and those who rely on private organisations. This undermines the value of Churches as institutional allies. EMF is favourable to collaborating with churches and report frequent and good relations, but other groups such as SL are more cautious, noting that churches are reluctant to accept any regulation of their sector. These differences, however, do not preclude collaboration on specific issues, particularly when the national levels are involved. A triangulation between EU institutional activists, EU movement activists and the national levels takes place. There emerges a mix of national and EU institutional activism, the alliance of various EU groups and cross national groups, but in assessing outcomes one also needs to bear in mind the fundamental impact of national-level politics when legislation takes place at national level.

Obstacles to mobilisation

Although the anti-racist movement has organized significant protest events in several EU countries, it has not taken off as prominently and concertedly as the environmental or peace movements. The successful mobilisation of the early and mid-nineties is now decreasing, and this has is reflected in Brussels. One EYF activist noted “A sense of fatigue towards the organisations, but also towards the topic”.

A limit to effective mobilisation is also set by the difference between the conscience constituency - white Europeans working as institutional activists and lobbyists - and migrants’ representatives. Connected to these problems, there is the difficult issue of representation. Brussels activists would like to consult their members, but consultation is often difficult, time-consuming and inconclusive. Thus they are forced to decide for themselves on issues of
strategy or how to advise the Commission to channel funding to national projects, etc. And this can then lead to accusations of insensitivity to local views, bureaucratisation, catering to vested interests.

EU institutions are the only effective referent of EU level movements. Attempts to involve business, as in the environmental case, have proven fairly unsuccessful. The EMF is planning to try again after a new member of staff has joined, in the near future, but they say that lack of time has so far limited attempts to contact business. The SL is of a similar opinion. The EYF does minor market consulting and plans to try harder in the future. Others are not particularly connected to business. EU institutions, on the other hand, have permanent and generally positive relations with movement organisations. All organisations have a positive attitudes towards them. Individual CEU officials are often praised for their competence, their sense of strategy, their commitment. Access is easily obtained for many organisations.

One should not, however, see the inter-organisational relations as unproblematic or the line between institutional activists and other activists as one that is simple to cross. Not only do institutional activists have much better personal resources and institutional power, but there can be some resentment from movement activists over the brain drain that EU institutions engender, and the mutual interdependence can cause what one activists described as a love-hate relation. The organisational interconnections create problems of loyalty in addition to brain drain. One EYF activist said

> This is political work and people have an interest in making political careers, being in the Parliament, being in the Commission. So it often happens that people from here (the EYF) jump on to the administrative level, become Eurocrats. People win concourses, they are asked to put themselves forward.

And noted that two previous members of the secretariat had found jobs in the Commission. But this finding cannot be generalised. Other organisations, such as Solidar, see entry in the Commission as rare and they report inter-organisational transfers as more frequent in the opposite direction, with EP assistants becoming movements’ lobbyists. But described the sector as overall static

> The NGO community in Brussels is quite static. In the time I have been here (several years) there have been a handful of changes at the level of general secretaries and below. And most organisations are three to five people. I probably know most of them. It is quite static really. Most directors of networks have been there for some time…

Nevertheless, as several projects are short-term, there is a relatively high turnover at low levels, although some groups try to promote internally to retain good personnel.

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11 One should also mention the less relevant presence as an interlocutor of the Council of Europe.

12 He pointed out that one of the reasons for the limited mobility is that there is nowhere to go after an important NGO position in Brussels. There is no revolving door with government positions as there is in some member states.
Success or failure?

The issue of success or failure is a difficult one for movement organisations and lobbies that collaborate closely with institutions, since it is difficult to see a connection between action and results. One activist noted:

It would be very difficult if we want to measure our success on the programs. We do not. We find it very difficult to evaluate how effective our lobby capacity or policy work is… We have joint objectives. For us it is an achievement when we can say “we raised the issue”. But it is a love-hate relation because they want to keep us short of funding and still they want us to do things.

If it is difficult to judge success from outcomes, it is less difficult to do so in terms of how activists play their game. Another activist pointed out:

I can watch the comments being put in from organisations, and from Parliamentarians. And I can tell you on the basis of that who is working and who isn’t working. It is the quality of the interventions, the speed of response, the regularity of information, all those things. I think that you are being assessed all the time, and if you make a mistake people know.

This means that not only other activists know, but institutional activists as well, which, according to some activists, will directly reflect on chances of receiving financial support. Activists argued that the anti-racist organisations are not always delivering as they could, and that some are much more effective with their money than others. The same point was made by an MEP who also lamented their fragmentation. This situation of relative organisational ineffectiveness in the anti-racist field was argued to be one of the contributing factors to the lack of influence and the small size of anti-racist initiatives in EU institutions. This, some think, will improve after ENAR the specific anti-racist network becomes fully operational in the near future, complementing the present migration network which is now the main channel for anti-racist initiatives. Another problem is a problem of delegation and turnover. Some activists have noted that effective delegation might not be conforming to their own movement principles but they argue that it is still necessary. Yet they feel uneasy and are unable to practice it effectively. Turnover is a problem for several organisations. On the one hand, an activist pointed out that the entire ‘family’ of left-liberal movement organisations does not include more than 200 or 300 people permanently in Brussels and that over time one meets most of them. On the other hand, people move across projects and organisations causing problems of organisational learning deficit.
These problems of resources and work method are not shared by institutional activists, who often feel they can do much successful work even in difficult conditions. In fact, small size can be helpful, according to a Commission official in that it sustains team spirit and commitment.

Yet, if one compares the anti-discrimination policy area with other EU areas, such as environmental policy-making, it appears fragmented and weak. It is a weakness that reflects the overall weakness of the field in member states. Anti-discriminatory measures have appeared in a piecemeal and ad hoc fashion everywhere, without coherent strategies and state responses have often failed for political reasons to recognise that migration is a permanent phenomenon (Wrench in Wrench and Solomos 1993: 24). EU institutions’ evaluation of success has to be framed in this general European situation.

Conclusions

A global assessment of the anti-racist movement in Brussels points to a movement well-supported by institutions, well-resourced, with competent and motivated activists coming from all over Europe, and yet a weak and fragmented movement. As an MEP noted, with the exclusion of the extreme right, there is an ample consensus on anti-racism across the political spectrum. The recent spate of anti-racist attacks on migrants has provided the movement with political opportunities, has engendered in the European publics sympathy for the plight of racial minorities’, vulnerable to xenophobic intolerance. Yet the movement has only seen a brief revival in the early nineties and its policy achievements have been modest.

It is difficult to attribute these difficulties to a lack of political opportunity in the strict sense of opportunities emerging from dynamics occurring within the political system. It is a movement with ample elite allies, not particularly repressed, operating in an inclusive political environment, and there is in EU institutions a desire of the moderate right to distance itself from the extreme right by indicting racism even when attempting to limit migratory flows. However, if one conceptualises opportunities more broadly and focuses on the cultural-political opportunities of this movement, some fundamental difficulties of anti-racism are encountered that explain its predicament. One needs to consider two orders of factors: the movement ideological crisis and the general cultural context.

As for the movement ideological crisis, this focuses on a fundamental indecision between assimilative and multicultural strategies. It is an uncertainty that has fundamental policy repercussions, that limits the activity of institutional activists who are unsure of which measures to privilege. The second type of problem refers to the global cultural context and takes place at several levels.

As previously mentioned, the escalation of migration and the increased visibility of racist attacks, emerged in a period when it was culturally unacceptable to call for centralised solutions at a European level unless it was strictly necessary. Hence anti-racist policy is not as easily considered, as it would have been in another period. Some governments are not ready to accept common deliberation on their immigration policy, or even of some anti-racist initiatives. For instance, the British Conservatives opposed the establishment of the YAR on grounds of its alleged threat to sovereignty. Furthermore, the current crisis of legitimacy of the process of European construction makes it of doubtful utility to insist at the political-cultural level on increasing Brussels’ visibility with substantial inroads in
new policy areas, particularly controversial areas such as anti-racism. The only way to do it is to de-politicise anti-racism, which is indeed what EU policy-makers have attempted to do. But that has run into problems as it has clashed with the traditional militant left-wing nature of anti-racism. Evidence of these problems is to be found in the controversies of the representatives selected as interlocutors by the Commissions. The crisis of anti-racist movements has been particularly well examined in Britain, where the oldest and strongest anti-racist movement has emerged. Some of the difficulties of the British anti-racist movement, I believe, also explain the problems at the European level. As Bonnett (1993: 57) points out, the recent revival of anti-racism has glossed over some of its traditional problems by focusing on the urgency of reacting to right-wing attacks, but that it is ultimately an unsatisfactory strategy. It relies on unforeseeable violent events and it does not address the substantial ideological divides within the anti-racist movement that prevent co-ordinated action. Of course co-ordinated action and synergy can well be seen as a goal that has proven unachievable to many movements which are only successful when they find valuable political opportunity in externally provided grievances, and in the context of anti-racism could even be undesirable as it would reduce the richness of anti-racist approaches (Solomos 1993: 216-217). But a common political opportunity of the kind that faces the environmental movement is unlikely to result from racist attacks, even when particularly repellent. These tend to remain confined to specific locations and at best entire European member states, but they are unlikely to be significantly reflected in EU level politics without a viable co-ordination of groups and initiatives.

Whilst in many EU countries the recent anti-racist movement has concentrated narrowly on opposing right-wing extremism, this has not happened at the Brussels’ level. Precisely because of this broad European focus, at the Brussels level there has been a deficit of transfer of detailed policy elaboration, high-quality activist expertise and movement-generated resources that is available to other movements. In addition, different priorities and unresolved ideological controversies remain in the background preventing real synergy among the groups. Yet, despite all these problems, the recent changes in the Amsterdam treaty could activate positive developments for the movement. They could, for instance, result in legislation that stimulates the emergence of a new brand of institutional activists, people that in business and public institutions review race relations and promote a constant stream of new initiatives to curb racism; they could stimulate more research by Universities and Government think-tanks into racism that would entrench anti-racism in a broader range of institutions. A similar development could soon take place in Brussels. The current debate on ‘civil dialogue’, which centres on the formation of a European Social Forum goes in the same direction. NGOs are asking for formal consultative status and EU institutions are considering organising and formalising the relation between the EU and NGOs as a counterweight to the present dominance of the economic dimension in Brussels. This initiative could expand and empower the body of all social-exclusion institutional activists, including anti-racists whose cultural relevance it is not likely to decline.

All over Europe the rate of legal and hidden migration continues to remain high, and the issue of the rights of Moslem minorities remains high on the political agenda. This being so, the accompanying issue of race relations is unlikely to fade in significance. The anti-
racist movement will continue to be a substantial presence in the political arena. Even if it is fragmented, sometimes unfocused and weak in achieving policy changes, it will continue to represent a powerful moral concern likely to increasingly permeate European civil society. But whether the leap to major policy influence that has emerged in other countries will take place in Europe is related to the movement’s focus. As a movement, it faces the challenge that Ben-Tovim (1997:217) calls ‘the attainment of a common language for anti-racism in Europe’. Until this happens, it seems unlikely that its institutional activists could acquire positions of real influence and begin the cycle of policy action that reinforce institutional activism and that in turns gives additional policy influence to institutional activists, which has empowered the environmental movement in Brussels. At the moment, the anti-racist movement’s multiple institutional niches within the EU institutional framework are sufficient to give it some resources and influence, but it remains a marginal voice in relation to the salience of the issue among European publics.
References


