



## NEWS REPORT

<b>Update of flash report nr:</b>	BE-43 (January 2010)
<b>Date:</b>	18 November 2010
<b>Expert:</b>	Emmanuelle Bribosia
<b>Title:</b>	The Final Report of the “Assizes on Interculturality” ( <i>Assises de l’interculturalité</i> ).
<b>Country:</b>	Belgium
<b><u>Context</u></b>	
<b>Issue at stake:</b>	Recommendations issued on 8 November 2010 by the Steering Committee established within the framework of the “Assizes on Interculturality”.
<b>Ground of discrimination:</b>	All grounds (but mainly religion and belief, race and ethnic origin).
<b>Source:</b>	Political development.
<b>Field:</b>	All fields.
<b>Legislative provisions:</b>	
<b><u>Content</u></b>	

**Political development:** Further to a federal government agreement of 18 March 2008, a national debate on multiculturalism and diversity named the “Assizes on Interculturality” was launched. Thereby, works conducted by a Steering Committee from September 2009 to September 2010 have led to a Final Report handed in to the Federal Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Employment and Equal Opportunities in charge of Immigration and Asylum, Mrs. Joëlle Milquet, on 8 November 2010. The Final Report contains 67 recommendations grouped by themes: education; employment governance; goods and services (health and housing), community work, culture and media.

In the education field, the Steering Committee notably recommends to integrate the learning of intercultural skills by teachers during trainings, to introduce cultural diversity into course syllabus and to have the teaching staff mirroring the diversity of origins present in the society. Another important issue dealt with by the Committee concerns the wearing of religious signs by students. The later recommends, as a compromise between opposing tendencies, a legislative ban on wearing religious symbols



until the third year of secondary school, followed by a legislative general authorisation to wear them from the fourth year of secondary school, that is to say from the age of 15-16.

In the employment field, the Steering Committee has noticed that persons of Moroccan or Turkish origin are six times more likely to lose their job and are still often discriminated against in hiring.

For this reason, the Committee suggests different solutions, such as the use of socio-economic monitoring techniques to measure diversity in employment (especially to observe discrimination on the grounds of nationality and origin), the establishment of quotas to allow the hiring of persons belonging to minorities (mostly on the basis of objective grounds such as nationality and origin), and the introduction of anonymous CVs to avoid discrimination based on the applicants' names or nationality. The Committee has also tackled the issue of reasonable accommodations in the workplace. The Act of 10 May 2007, aiming at fighting some forms of discrimination, already provides for reasonable accommodation in the employment field, but only on the grounds of disability. This time the Committee suggests that a reflection regarding the enlargement of this concept to other grounds of discrimination, notably in religious and philosophical matters should be initiated. The Steering Committee also recommends an adaptation of the calendar of legal public holidays, which generally correspond to Christian religious festivals. The proposal is to retain five public holidays (National Day, New Year's Day, Christmas Day, Labour Day and Armistice Day), then to create three new public holidays without any religious connotation (for example, International Women's Day or International Day Against Racism and Xenophobia) and finally to allow everyone to choose freely two floating days according to their culture or religion.

In the field of governance, the Steering Committee essentially promotes the principle of freedom regarding the wearing of religious symbols in public services, that the officer be in contact with the public or not, unless he acts as an authority (for example, a judge). The Committee also reminds that Belgium should transform the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism into an inter-federal body– and not only federal – or create independent authorities at the federal entities level, in order to comply with EU Anti-Discrimination Directives. Furthermore, the Committee stresses out the “duty of memory”. For that purpose, it suggests



reforming the Act of 23 March 1995, aiming at suppressing negation, minimization, justification and approbation of the genocide committed by German National Socialist regime during the Second World War. This would consist in clarifying the scope of the law and enlarging it to others genocides. Also, the Committee recommends that the political authorities recognize the Belgian colonial past and apologize for the dramatic events related. In this respect, it would be symbolically important to remove all traces of this past, for example in the names of streets or public spaces.

In the field of health and housing, the Steering Committee notably recommends that the authorities provide more social housing of large size in order to be adapted to large family needs, that they make available more lands for Roma people, and that they still fight against discrimination regarding private housing (for example, by sensitizing all actors involved, such as landlords or estate agents, to the importance of informing authorities of all cases they might know).



In the fields of community work, culture and media, the Steering Committee mainly suggests a better representation of cultural diversity, by facilitating their access to persons belonging to minorities, and stresses the importance of intercultural skills in these fields.

**Internet link source and additional information:**

<http://www.interculturalite.be/Rapport-2010?lang=fr>