



## **6<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**

### **OF THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS PLATFORM**

**25–26 APRIL, VIENNA**

Maija Sakslin

Chairperson of the Management Board

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the FRA Management Board, I would like to warmly welcome you all here today to the Fundamental Rights Platform meeting!

The Fundamental Rights Agency is organising this meeting, as it has done every year since its establishment, for the 6<sup>th</sup> time. The aim is to give you an opportunity to play an active role in FRA's work. As you know, the Agency assists EU institutions and Member States with evidence-based advice on fundamental rights. And you represent real concerns and different interests, you have direct links to the people in Europe, so you can give us valuable input.

In the course of my work, I have often been involved with civil society. So I am happy to continue this cooperation now with you, at an EU level.

I therefore look forward to meeting many of you and listening to the many views that will be expressed here over the coming two days. In this context I would like to welcome:

- First of all, the representatives of over 200 civil society organisations present today;
- Ms Göncz, Mr Romeva and Ms Lunacek, Members of the European Parliament;
- Deaglán Ó Briain, from the Irish Ministry of Justice and Equality representing the EU Presidency / Council of the European Union;

- colleagues from the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE;
- and representatives from the National Human Rights Institutions, from the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in Hungary and the Norwegian Grants - who will speak later on how the grants can help fund NGO work on fundamental rights.

Dear friends and colleagues,

Over the last six years, the Fundamental Rights Platform has become a much appreciated mechanism for dialogue and cooperation between the FRA and civil society. Today and tomorrow we will continue to engage in fruitful dialogue, as we are working together to promote fundamental rights across Europe. Thanks to your participation, we have a true platform for dialogue.

Director Kjaerum will speak later about cooperation between FRA and the FRP. Meanwhile, I would like to briefly mention some recent developments that may interest you.

### **Firstly, the agency's new Multi-annual Framework**

As you know, in March the Council of the European Union adopted the agency's new Multi-annual Framework for 2013-2017. It sets out the nine key areas that FRA will work on in the coming years. While a lot remains from the earlier framework, other areas have been expanded, merged or are totally new, as you can see behind me.

New is, for example, that 'Roma integration' is now mentioned as a standalone area. It is often said that the topic of Roma is the most burning fundamental rights issue in the EU today. FRA therefore very much welcomes this decision, as it is important for the promotion, protection and enforcement of many fundamental rights of many people in the EU. We also see this as an important recognition of FRA's vital role in the EU's framework for Roma integration, and in working with Member States on their national strategies.

Beyond the areas that are explicitly mentioned in the Multi-Annual Framework, the agency can always become active upon request from an EU institution. This includes work in the area of judicial cooperation. Although judicial cooperation is mentioned in the Framework, former third pillar areas, such as police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters are still excluded – unless the Agency is asked by the EU institutions to work in these areas.

**Secondly, FRA's independent external evaluation**, carried out last year. The Agency's Founding Regulation stipulated such an external evaluation 5 years after the creation of the agency. An external evaluator interviewed well over 300 key

stakeholders - either online, by phone, or face-to-face. Questions were asked about the impact of the agency's work, its openness and responsiveness to stakeholders, its efficiency and effectiveness. A big thank you to all of you who contributed. At the agency, we are currently working on the recommendations made by stakeholders. The European Commission will publish the final evaluation report around summer, together with our conclusions and action points.

However, already at this stage, I would like to share some of the main findings:

- I'm very pleased that FRP is acknowledged as an effective channel of cooperation between the FRA and civil society.
- FRA is seen as accessible and responsive to stakeholders and their needs, and respondents are satisfied with the agency's work.
- FRA is considered to be a unique provider of comparative, EU-wide studies on fundamental rights in Europe.
- The Fundamental Rights Platform is acknowledged as being an effective channel for cooperation between FRA and civil society.
- Civil society organisations are generally satisfied with our work, but think the agency's mandate should be broader. Member States appreciate FRA's work at the EU level. However, they believe FRA should increase its relevance and visibility nationally. This was also recommended by the external evaluators.

FRA's Management Board has also stressed the need for FRA to increase its visibility and relevance at the national level. This is also where many of you work and are active, and where we hopefully can best support you, and help you in your work. This will be reflected in the new FRA Strategy Plan which we are developing and which will include the long-term goals and priorities for 2013-2018.

At FRA we are currently developing concrete action plans to follow the recommendations from the external evaluation. This is part of FRA's continuous drive to enhance our impact, our usefulness and relevance for our stakeholders - especially you, representing civil society.

Dear participants of the 6<sup>th</sup> Fundamental Rights Platform meeting,

I wish this opportunity to exchange views on fundamental rights may help you in your challenging and sometimes lonely work at home. In the spirit of cooperation, I would like to officially open our meeting. I very much look forward to lively and stimulating discussions throughout the meeting.

Thank you very much, and welcome.