



**Legal seminar 6 October 2009  
on the implementation of EU law on equal opportunities and anti-discrimination**

**OPENING SPEECH BY BELINDA PYKE - SUMMARY**

Belinda Pyke opened the legal seminar by welcoming all participants to this second legal seminar bringing together almost 200 persons from Governments, equality bodies and academic institutions across the EU. This attendance shows the level of interest for this seminar and for discussing recent legal developments in the area of anti-discrimination.

This seminar comes at a very interesting time, with the establishment of the new Barroso II Commission as well as a new European Parliament. The current Commission has been very active in our area and the next Commission should pursue and reinforce its action against discrimination.

In 2008, the Commission approved a proposal to extend protection against discrimination on disability, age, religion and conviction and sexual orientation beyond the field of employment. In doing so, the aim of the Commission is to cover all grounds not yet covered outside employment and thus complete the legal framework against discrimination at EU level.

The Commission has also tabled proposals on extending maternity leave, improving the protection for independent women workers and a parental leave Directive based on an agreement between European social partners.

These legislative proposals should be seen in the wider context of the priority that the new Commission will give to improving access to rights for all EU citizens, equal opportunities being central to this endeavour.

It belongs to us to reflect on how to protect people from discrimination and to create more integrated societies. For this, we need not only a strong and clear political will. We also need the intellectual background, the experience and reflection that show to the public and to policy makers the extent of the problem and how to tackle it. The discussions during the legal seminar, and in particular in the workshops, are intended to allow this deeper exchange of views around the most recent work carried out by the legal experts from the legal networks on anti-discrimination and gender equality who are with us today.

In conclusion, Belinda Pyke underlined that the work on these issues should be linked to the considerable short and long term challenges brought by the economic crisis, climate change and demographic trends. To address these global issues, it is essential to recall that better integrated societies are part of the response.