Summary

Local and regional mediations: the semantics of (anti-)racism and 'integration' at the interplay between institutions, organisations and people

November 2011

This report shows the results of a comparative empirical analysis of the ways in which different national/regional/local public policies on integration/inclusion and anti-racism/anti-discrimination in the **employment** life sphere shape discourses and social interactions in each context (**Portugal, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom**). Employment is a key sphere due to its major influence on the production and implementation of discourses and policies on integration, multiculturality and interculturality. Accordingly, TOLERACE analyses how racism and anti-racism is being reconfigured in notions such as 'employability', 'entrepreneurism', 'activation of competences' and 'cultural difference', core to the employment life sphere.

A fundamental result of this phase of the research work is that dominant approaches in the field are making it **difficult to discuss racism and racial discrimination as a political phenomenon embedded in the everyday functioning of democratic institutions**. Policies on 'inclusion' and 'employability' are often framed as a question of social assistance, with the agents in charge of their implementation (e.g. local authorities, NGOs, local public servants) seeing their work as aiming to 'correct' perceived deficits in the populations' characteristics, culture or values that would restrict their integration into the labour market (i.e. 'backward' cultural practices, 'passivity', 'unrealistic expectations' or 'unwillingness' to integrate).

The following main results can be highlighted:

- **Anti-racism policies and legislation to protect racialised groups by tackling racist structures and practices in recruitment and professional training processes are being replaced by a strong discourse on difference,**

diversity and identity. The deployment of this discourse on difference both naturalises and legitimises the 'unsuccessful' inclusion of immigrants/minorities in the labour market and their 'unfitness' for living among 'us'. Similarly, their 'presence' and status as guest-workers – assumed to be temporary – is often not seen as problematic, since it preserves assumed forms of political belonging and the presumed original homogeneity of the 'autochthonous' population.

• **The case studies focusing on Muslims and employment have enabled the relevance of Islamophobia in understanding their exclusion and discrimination to be identified**. Parallel to this, the research also highlights the wider political context that disavows issues of institutional racism in favour of a language that takes racism to be ignorance and/or misunderstanding. Policy developments and routine practices examined in the employment sector illustrate the way in which they are being shaped by the wider discourse on Muslims as 'problematic', 'self-segregating' and 'dangerous'.

• The cases focusing on policy developments that take the **Roma** as target-beneficiaries revealed **their construction as a people 'estranged from modernity'**; their 'characteristics' and 'culture' function by regulating the expectations that the state and society in general should have regarding their 'successful' inclusion in the labour market. Racism is thus reproduced through the constant **ontologisation of the Roma/Gypsies as 'pathological' subjects, which is assumed to be the structural condition facing public policies**. The case study on the Roma in Portugal identified how the question of 'difference' has become, in the employment sphere, a discursive trap within the neo-liberal paradigm of 'empowerment' and 'activation of competences'. Much academic work continues to focus on the opposing stereotypical representations of majority and minority groups. The state systems of bio-political administration are generally left out of the analysis or superficially mentioned as a problem of the gap between laws/policies and their effective application.

• Case studies on contexts in which **the figure of the 'immigrant-worker'** is central to policy developments (e.g. Spain: El Egido-Andalusia and Rioja Alavesa-Basque Country), often related to employment in the agricultural sector, reveal **the constant redrawing of the 'abyssal line' between the local 'We' and the 'other'**. The 'immigrant imaginary' is therefore reconfigured through the deployment of discourses and practices that ontologise this condition and preclude the reformulation of political belonging and vicinity. **The 'immigrant-**

worker' is subsumed in policy developments, which are pervaded by the discursive field of 'normalisation' that foregrounds the idea that immigration (within the narrative of Southern European countries becoming new immigration countries), although 'necessary', has disrupted the normal functioning of society. This has been clearly identified in the case-study in Andalusia.

• Discussions on racism directed towards ethnic minorities, and barriers to employment should not be seen as a clear cut picture of denial; instead **the research identified the ways in which racism is accommodated within a wider field of policy intervention that stresses minorities' and immigrants' 'lack of knowledge of cultural and social codes in the (national) labour market' as a main barrier** (e.g. the Danish case study). Local policy makers and public servants and NGO professionals thus recognise that structural discrimination exists, but they seem to perceive discrimination as potentially self-inflicted. This ambiguity reflects the general caution in defining and recognising problems as related to discrimination.

• **In general terms, all the case studies examined point towards the dominant understanding that connects the existence of racism to racists (whether through delusion or ignorance), and thus to individual reform as the solution to racism rather than social transformation**. In particular, it is common to locate discrimination on a continuum that ranges from 'subtle prejudice', 'social indifference' and 'negative attitudes', to 'intolerance', 'exclusion' and 'racism'. In other words, racism is seen as an extreme but rare form of behaviour. This approach conceives of racism as a reciprocal attitude between groups, removing it from any 'recognition of the powers that produce and contour it'. **Any anti-racist initiative, which is already marginal as we have seen in the projects and policies analysed, is relegated to a well-bounded 'cultural sphere' focussing on the ephemeral celebration of the other's culture**.