

European Network Against Racism

anti-racist advocacy 'wrapped up in nice paper'

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**European Network Against
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'wrapped up in nice paper'**

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Helene Pristed Nielsen

Abstract

This article reviews ENAR’s (European Network Against Racism) history from its inception in 1998 to the present – a development which reflects an increasing need for a professionalised lobby organisation with the ability to respond to Brussels-induced demands. Furthermore, against the backdrop of discussions about intersectionality, the article investigates ENAR’s attention and ability to integrate questions of e.g. gender, sexuality or age in their policy input, given the potentially rigid compartmentalisation of discrimination strands within the European Commission’s system of civil society consultations. The article therefore overall aims to assess ENAR’s position as potentially hemmed in between 1) the Commission vs. member organisations’ expectations for its focus and *modus operandi* and 2) attention to intersectional discrimination vs. potential compartmentalisation within the Commission. The conclusions are that despite hardships faced along the way, ENAR has been able to successfully straddle such potentially opposing demands. In sum, the organisation has, as phrased by its Director ‘become smarter in ways to get our point across [...] you know, wrapped up in nice paper’.

Keywords: European Network Against Racism, anti-discrimination, advocacy groups, NGOization, intersectionality, EU

Introduction

From the point of view of social movement theory, ENAR (European Network Against Racism) is a strange creature. Partly being an outcome of the European Year Against Racism celebrated in 1997, ENAR was created in 1998 explicitly as an interlocutor with the European Commission in terms of its consultative functions, and is also referred to as ‘a privileged interlocutor with the European institutions’ (Fella & Ruzza 2013, 224). Consequently, much like the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) or ILGA-Europe (International Lesbian and Gay Association), ENAR may be regarded as an EU lobby organisation or – conversely – as a transnational social movement advancing the interests of a wide and geographically dispersed constituency. As Schnyder argues about such organisations overall (including ENAR), ‘their democratic legitimacy depends,

at least in part, on the substantive involvement of their constituency' (2016b, 903). This means that ENAR has to straddle potentially opposing expectations for its mode of operation: on the one hand, the need for professionalised lobbying and policy input; on the other hand, expectations and traditions for broad (sometimes street based) social protests, historically embraced by some of the member organisations which in several cases outdate ENAR itself by decades.

There is very little academic literature published on ENAR, which may seem curious when considering the rich academic literature on some of ENAR's fellow anti-discrimination organisations within Brussels, particularly the European Women's Lobby, which over the years has received comprehensive academic attention (for example: Hoskyns 1991; Williams 2003; Pudrovska and Ferree 2004; Woodward 2007; Lang 2009, 2013; Strid 2009; Rolandsen Agustín 2008, 2011; and Bygnes 2013). ENAR and its work, however, has rarely been addressed explicitly (exceptions include Bouget and Prouteau 2002; Ruzza 2000, 2011a, 2014; Fella and Ruzza 2013; Pristed Nielsen 2013a, 2013b; Schnyder 2016a, 2016b)ⁱ.

Based on the observed paucity of academic literature on ENAR, the aim of this article is to provide a review of ENAR's history, organisational developments since its inception, and current *modus operandi* as a Brussels based transnational advocacy network. The review is informed by two different theoretically inspired conundrums: 1) the potential dilemma of NGOization (Lang 2013) and representational strain of EU umbrella organisations (Schnyder 2016a); and 2) the question of whether compartmentalisation of discrimination strands set up within the Commission's system of civil society consultations may block attention to intersectional discrimination (Lombardo and Verloo 2009, Lombardo and Rolandsen Agustín 2011). These theoretical questions are elaborated under each their section of the analysis. First, however, a few words on data collection.

Approach and data collection

Given the scanty mentioning of ENAR in existing academic literature, the article is primarily based on empirical evidence in the form of documents released by ENAR itself, and mentioning of ENAR within debates in the European Parliament. But above all, it is based on six interviews with current and former staff at ENAR. Three of these interviews were conducted in 2008ⁱⁱ, and three new interviews were made in 2015ⁱⁱⁱ. Among the two sets of interviews, one interviewee has been interviewed both in 2008 and 2015, and interviewees span from the first Director of ENAR, in office from 1999-2005 to the current

Director, who has been in office since 2010. Altogether, the interviewees include all Directors of ENAR for the entirety of its organisational history and a few key staff members. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The three interviews from 2008 were conducted face-to-face in Brussels, while the three from 2015 took place over Skype. While the interviewees have not been promised anonymity, as this would be practically impossible to uphold, their names will not be used.

Evidence from the documents and interviews will be debated against two schisms frequently pointed to in academic literature: 1) the advancement of social interests at EU level – including debates over NGOization and interest representation, and 2) the place and role of intersectionality in anti-discrimination advocacy work. These two concerns from theoretically informed literature on interest representation and advocacy work at EU level serve to structure the article, whereby the remainder is divided into three main analytic sections. The first section addresses ENAR's origins and early history. The second section debates the organisation's mode of operation in relation to debates about advancing social interests at EU level and representing diverse constituencies. And finally, the article ends with a discussion of whether and how concerns for intersectional discrimination have been included in ENAR's work. Each subsection includes brief reviews of theoretical arguments, however, main emphasis is placed on empirical evidence relating to ENAR's work, as empirically grounded research on ENAR is in short supply.

ENAR's early history

From the point of view of social movement theory, ENAR is a strange creature. Partly being an outcome of the European Year against Racism celebrated in 1997, this organisation held its constitutive conference in 1998, and was created explicitly as an interlocutor with the European Commission. It has throughout its organisational life received funding from one of the Directorate Generals – in the first instance from DG V: Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (1999-2010) and currently DG Justice (2010-present), and this funding has consistently remained at about 80% of ENAR's total budget, the remaining 20% stemming from donors. I review ENAR's early history partly because this is interesting in its own right, as there has been so little previous research specifically on ENAR. But partly also because a review of ENAR's early history plays into arguments about the potential role of civil society organisations as 'legitimising' the European Union. As Ruzza argues:

The EU institutions have played a generalized facilitating role in the establishment of anti-racist movements in Brussels [...] the role of

social movements is important for the Commission and the European Parliament (EP) as a consequence of the perceived need for democratic legitimacy of the 'European Project' (2000, 154).

Della Porta speaks of EU supported campaigns for e.g. gender equality and anti-racism in the late 1990s as being 'evidence of the search for a moral basis for collective, European identity' (della Porta 2007, 199), and Bouget and Prouteau in their article, which specifically points to the formation of ENAR, argue that 'international NGOs serve both as sources of policy input and of legitimization of the decisions those bodies take' (2002, 36; see also Fella and Ruzza 2013). Furthermore, Cullen refers to how some Commission officials may regard NGOs as 'cheerleaders for European integration' (Cullen 2010, 323). Schnyder argues that ENAR (and other Brussels based umbrella organisations) may sometimes be used as 'strategic means of lending credibility' to proposals by the European Commission (2016b, 903).

The idea that the Commission and the European Parliament had a general interest in advancing equality advocacy groups in the EU, and a specific interest in advancing European level mobilisation against racism, and therefore acted as 'midwives' for ENAR, is further supported by a number of sources (Ruzza 2000; Bouget and Prouteau 2002; Fella and Ruzza 2013), including interviews conducted for the present article. Thus, Chopin and Niessen note in a proposal from the Starting Line Group that 'there is evidence of willingness among the Union's institutions to proceed towards effective action' and go on to refer to examples of a number of initiatives by both the EP and the Commission over the previous decade (as quoted in Ruzza 2000, 155). In fact, both Chopin and Niessen played central roles themselves in the formation of ENAR. Hence, Chopin is the author of one of the very first publications by ENAR (1999), and Niessen was referred to by the first Director as having played a key role in ENAR's foundation:

The European Commission signalled that they would be ready to provide funding, and there was a guy [...] Jan Niessen. He picked up that initiative, he was director [...] until recently of the Migration Policy Group, [...] and they took up the initiative saying 'okay, let us think in terms of how can it be built up?' and we started connecting at the national levels. Jan and some other colleagues that were involved in the preparation of the network had been involved in this group 'Starting Line'.

Starting Line's key role in preparing the way for the formation of ENAR is further supported by other sources (Chopin 1999; Geddes 2000; Bouget and Prouteau 2002).

Ruzza argues that the new article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty ‘jump-started’ (2000, 146) the process of putting anti-racism on the agenda and sowed the seeds for creating an anti-racism advocacy coalition. However, interview evidence and older documents from ENAR itself, and from the Starting Line Group, suggest that the process could perhaps better be described as a simultaneous convergence of interests. The Starting Line Group had been working since 1992 on pushing for legislative measures to combat racism within the EU (Chopin and Niessen 2004, 100), and both Bouget and Prouteau (2002) and Geddes (2000) refer to how the Commission had an interest in building alliances, mentioning groups such as The Starting Line, The European Union Migrants Forum and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles. At the same time, Ruzza speaks of ‘a core of MEPs with a specific interest in anti-racism’ (2000, 156), and interview statements also support the impression that while things were cooking up at grassroots level, this process of coming together was also very much facilitated by signals of good-will from the Commission as well as several MEPs. On the question of institutional support, Ruzza reports in an article from 2000 that a head of unit within the Commission said in an interview that ‘there should be a secretariat or a small platform [...] with an agenda [...] they should have one programme [...] so that will be our partner for all the activities in the area of racism’ (2000, 161). My own interview evidence, however, also points to an active role played from the grassroots level. Hence, the first Director of ENAR said:

There had been people that were involved in the Starting Line Group pushing for Article 13 in the Amsterdam Treaty, so they had a very good idea of the legal side. What was missing was the NGO-structure, to do the advocacy and the networking. So that was the founding idea of ENAR.

Ruzza writes specifically about the ‘birth’ of ENAR that ‘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’ (2000, 152; see also Bouget and Prouteau 2002, 35). This was confirmed and elaborated upon by the first Director, who was present at the constitutive conference and said about the founding of the organisation:

Well, in fact, in 1997, there was the European Year against Racism, and during that year, as far as I know, the European Commission [...] was sort of supporting the idea of developing a European Network against Racism, because it did not exist at that point in time. [...] there was nothing in the field of racism. Racism became much more central with these conservative-populist right-wing parties in Austria and in other countries, so it was quite an issue during that time. The

European Commission signalled that they would be ready to provide funding.

As it was eventually revealed, not only was the Commission ready to provide funding, they were in fact already providing funding without having a legal basis for doing so. As explained by an interviewee:

In 1996, I think it was, and the Commission was already quite intensively working on anti-racism projects and giving funding and stuff like that, without having a legal basis in the treaty, which was quite a problem, because some of the MEPs said ‘Well, what are you doing, you are spending money without a legal basis, that is impossible, you have to stop this’.

In other words, there was such ideological support for certain social activist groups among Commission officials that apparently moral conviction went ahead of legal basis. This led to a situation in which the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion ‘started financing social NGOs in the early 1990s, but via unlawful methods until 1999’ (Kutay 2014, 65). As elaborated by Wolff ‘The situation followed the reluctance of the Council [...] to approve a fourth Poverty Programme in 1994. The Commission (and the EP) then continued funding the beneficiaries of the previous programmes on the basis of their discretionary budgetary power’ (2013, 96). Based on allegations raised by British MEPs, ‘that the Commission’s support of social NGOs had no legal basis’ (Kutay 2014, 65), the Santer Commission was forced to admit ‘irregularities’ (BBC 1999), and was eventually forced to step down on March 15th 1999.

In the end, however, the NGOs won the day in several respects: not only because the legal basis for funding was eventually established – including support for the by then recently formed ENAR – but also because the case provided strong impetus for transnational mobilisation, and hence the NGOs emerged as strengthened from the confrontation (Alhadeff and Wilson 2002).

ENAR’s room for manoeuvre

Apart from the apparent ideological support for anti-racism advocacy groups documented and discussed above, further incentives to support the formation of an organisation like ENAR may have come out of considerations for balancing input received in the Commission. EU institutions have, in Ruzza’s words, been ‘anxious to create a social counterpart to the dominance of organized business interests’ (2000, 146). Furthermore, Ruzza and Fella argue that ‘Directorates attempt to expand their competencies, and in doing so, a strategy of supporting civil society groups and using them to gain political relevance and legitimacy is

at least in part a tool at their disposal' (2013, 40). However, as della Porta points out, 'only the organizations that adapt to the rules of the game obtain routine access to EU institutions' (2007, 197). Based on such considerations, this section of the article assesses ENAR's position as potentially hemmed in between different expectations for its focus and *modus operandi*. As documented below, a maturing process seems to have taken place, whereby ENAR has become more streetwise in terms of how to deal with Commission expectations (better at wrapping up things 'in nice paper' as the Director phrased it), but where national member organisations are also increasingly recognising the EU level as important for their locally based activities.

A different, and slightly less benevolent, interpretation of the organisational transformations which ENAR has undergone would be to say that it has been 'NGOized'. NGOization 'refers to the process by which social movements professionalize, institutionalize, and bureaucratize in vertically structured, policy-outcome-oriented organizations that focus on generating issue-specific and, to some degree, marketable expert knowledge or services' (Lang 2013, 63-64). Despite her critical stance towards processes of NGOization and the (fading) democratizing potentials of NGOs, Lang does underscore how she sees the concept as describing 'a culturally and politically mutable tendency rather than a narrowly confined path' (Lang 2013, 65). Lang's cautioning about NGOization relates to the general prospects for developing an inclusive public sphere in which social movements and NGOs may advance the interests of voices not often heard in political decision making. Specifically discussing the relationship between EU umbrella organisations and their nationally based members, Schnyder discusses how 'even the politically-savvy [nationally based] organisations may face barriers that prevent active participation' in the work of the umbrella organisations (2016b, 909). Furthermore, Ruzza relates how the EU system and the DGs are not interested in collaborating with amateurs, or with groups using unconventional tactics and not sufficiently 'cosmopolitan' in outlook. Hence, Ruzza writes, 'the groups that make it to Brussels are generally skilled in policy advocacy. They are more ready to engage in strategic framing of their political discourse which is made compatible with the overarching mythologies and policy goals of the EU' (2011a, 221). Overall, however, Schnyder's detailed content analysis of webpages of respectively ENAR and ECRE (European Council on Refugees and Exiles) and their respective issue priorities among national member organisations and the Brussels based umbrellas reveal 'considerable common ground between member organisations and umbrellas' (2016a, 752). Fella and Ruzza's case studies of anti-racist movements in six different European countries point to differences in attitudes towards ENAR among different nationally based activists, with more trust expressed by British activists and less by the French activists. Overall, they conclude that 'Although the utility of the work of the main EU-level network,

ENAR, is recognised, it was often viewed as a rather institutionalised body [...and] being top-down in orientation' (2013, 228).

One thing is meeting member organisations' expectations for focus and priorities, another may be to meet Commission expectations for *modus operandi*. Based on the logic of 'don't bite the hand that feeds you', it would seem natural to question whether an organisation like ENAR is able to uphold a critical distance towards the Commission. Generally, funds from the Commission make up 80% of ENAR's total budget, and according to the first Director, this has been the case right from the beginning. ENAR's allocated budgets from the Commission have been relatively stable since its inception. The earliest year from which information has been available is 2001, in which ENAR received just over 700,000 Euros^{iv}, until the latest available figure from 2015, which is 792,955.69 Euro in Commission funding^v. Thus, the financial crisis starting in 2008 seems to have had no immediate impact on the funds available for ENAR from the Commission. Ruzza states that although the financial crisis has had an adverse impact on the entire minority protection sector, 'the field is also sufficiently consolidated to allow for a substantially unchanged continuation of activities' (2011a, 230). According to the current Director, the impact of the financial crisis was probably most felt at national level among member organisations seeking funding for their work, as well as in terms of 'the other 20%' (i.e. the 20% of the ENAR budget not stemming from DG Justice), which he referred to as 'a real nightmare', particularly after the onset of the crisis. Hence, Ruzza's assessment that 'the field [of minority protection] remains vital and active in pursuing activities of representation, provision of information, triangulation among different networks and EU Member State levels' (2011a, 231) seems overall still to apply to ENAR.

While the budget seems stable, the number of staff has fluctuated rather a lot over the years. Ruzza (2000, 152) mentions four staff members from the outset, while the first Director said 'We started with three: the director, an officer and a secretary. We increased, I think, [...] up to, including part-time officers, up to eight or nine at a certain point in time. And it is basically going up and down all the time'. This can be confirmed by looking at Annual Reports, which reveal that for example in 2005, seven new staff members were hired (ENAR 2005, 3), but already in 2007, the total staff number was down to six^{vi}. According to the homepage, ENAR was by February 2017 comprised of 10 staff members plus an additional two interns^{vii}.

Apart from the size of the office in Brussels, it is equally important to look at the size of ENAR in terms of member organisations. In 2017, ENAR is a network of more than 100 member organisations, following its profound organisational transformation whereby the organisation on July 1st 2012 completely revoked its membership base and strategy for membership involvement. Previously, more

than 700 organisations held direct membership of ENAR (Pristed Nielsen 2013b, 184), but as stated by a staff member in 2015: ‘we did not have any clue about who they were’. Just how profound a change in membership structure this is, was underlined by a staff member:

So on 1st of July, 2012, we ‘fired’ the whole network, so it was a total reset, so we had zero members for a few days. So we said to the members ‘now you have to reapply according to the new rules’ [...] 55% of the membership today is completely new, so it was not among the membership before 2012, which is a really radical shift in terms of the membership, the representativeness of the organisation and so forth.

Cullen (2010) writes how EU social NGOs have been criticised for being elitist, with weak links to their grassroots, and accused of co-optation and inability to maintain distance from the EU institutions they are engaging with. However, as Cullen argues ‘such critiques are [...] at best oversimplifications and at worst seriously misleading’ (2010, 318), and Ruzza maintains that ‘a chain of downward and upward relations exists among CSOs and along it travel ideas, relations among activists of different Member States, and policy proposals are shared and discussed’ (2014, 77). One interviewee, explaining about the decision to revoke the membership base, was adamant that he saw ENAR as a ‘representative organisation’, and an organisation being part of an ‘emerging European public sphere’, facilitating better dialogue between grassroots and decision-maker levels within the EU, which also seems supported by empirical findings reported by Schnyder (2016a, 2016b). Arguments for restructuring were partly based on a desire to ‘trim down the governing structure of the organisation’, but the interviewee also referred to an improved internal dialogue among members as part of the result of the revised membership structure. One of the recurring occasions in which this improved dialogue is played out, is at general assembly meetings, as there are now fewer seats on the board, and candidates must per force obtain backing from multiple nationally based member organisations. As explained by one interviewee:

The candidates have to go, engage, try to seek funding, present themselves to the other members, so that is also a good way to [...] ensure that board members also have a better grasp of the membership. [...] So we really changed also towards what we wanted, in relation to become a content network, where the geographical dimension is less important [...] And we have been seeing [...] the impact in terms of quality and content, [as the] relevance of the work of ENAR has made a massive jump forwards.

The restructuring of the organisation may therefore have ‘encouraged socialisation’ – a solution which Schnyder points to as one way for umbrella

organisations to ‘take advantage of diversity’ (2016b, 909). While this interviewee was thus pleased with the outcomes of the restructuring, another cautiously replied ‘probably everyone that you would ask, would give you a different response’ when asked whether the restructuring had improved communications internally among member organisations and the ENAR office in Brussels. In summation, a review of the internal organisational reality of ENAR reveals that 1) the evolution of ENAR’s budget has witnessed only incremental change even in the face of the global financial crisis, 2) staff numbers have fluctuated continuously, and 3) the membership base has been entirely revoked, to be ‘smaller, but *stronger*’ (interviewee’s emphasis). In terms of external factors, an important change has been that ENAR’s place within the EU structure has changed. Initially referring to DG Employment and Social Affairs, ENAR changed its consultative function in 2010 and now refers to DG Justice.

This institutional change, however, did not have immediate measureable impact on the day-to-day activities, according to a current staff member. Hence,

[B]asically most of the people that work in [...] DG Employment have been moved to DG Justice. [...] in terms of staffers, we were on the same line, and this has not changed. But [...] in DG Justice, the tradition of working with civil society, it was completely different from DG Employment. Whereas in DG Employment, we had a very flexible, fluid, way of communicating, if we had an issue we would just pick up the phone and you fix things [...] And in DG Justice, this was absolutely not the case.

Another interviewee stated ‘they [DG Justice] have very little experience with civil society cooperation, and it got complicated, more complicated’. Fella and Ruzza also argue that DG Justice is considered to be more closed to civil society input than for example DG Social Affairs (2013, 224). One specific issue that has caused disagreements between ENAR and DG Justice is the fact that member organisations have specifically given ENAR a mandate to fight against the far-right in Europe, while DG Justice considers that ENAR should not advance an agenda relating to specific political parties. As explained by a current member of staff to exemplify this change in ENAR’s room for manoeuvre, there was an incident some years ago, where ENAR had received funding for a conference. In advance of the conference, ENAR sent the program and title to DG Justice, and then, only three days before the event, they received an email stating that the funding for the conference had been withdrawn – without further explanation. A few phone calls and some meetings later, it turned out that the DG Justice staff members had decided to revoke the funding due to the working title of the conference, which included a phrase about ‘countering the far-right’. Eventually, the funding was approved under the

condition that ENAR would ‘take away any reference to the far-right, because that is a democratically elected party [...] they were telling us “yeah, but you are too political” [...] but anti-racism is political!’ Traces of this schism may also be found in questions to the Commission raised by various members of the European Parliament. Specifically, MEPs Frank Vanhecke (EFD) and Philip Claeys (NI) have raised a number of critical questions about ENAR, for example relating to why ENAR is not producing its reports in Flemish, and whether it has permission to criticise EU-immigration policy, and also a question by Frédérique Ries (ALDE) about whether the Commission may indirectly be funding the Muslim Brotherhood through funds allocated through ENAR^{viii}.

While ENAR staff did refer to a change in working atmosphere when starting to refer to DG Justice instead of DG Employment, they laid it partly down to the rise of the far-right across Europe in general, and the increasing vociferousness of far-right MEPs, as well as the onset of the financial crisis and a general increase in financial control with all advocacy organisations receiving funding from the Commission.

Either way, collaboration with the Commission seems to have become less flexible over the years. Hence, the first Director related that ‘It *was* fairly flexible in the first two or three years, they said “okay, you are young, and you must develop”’ (interviewee’s emphasis). The same person stated:

I was actually quite surprised, coming from the national level, where the division between civil society activists and the government is much more apart. I was quite surprised about the very supportive attitude of the European Commission, in communication, in facilitating things, incorporating, and having a dialogue, and financially supporting things.

This supports a previous conclusion by Ruzza about the strength of the anti-racist movement in the EU in the late 1990s, which in his assessment ‘indicates a movement well-supported by institutions, well-resourced, with competent and motivated activists coming from all over Europe, and yet weak and fragmented’ (2000, 167). My current assessment of ENAR in particular would indicate a movement well-supported by institutions, relatively well-resourced, with competent and motivated activists coming from all over Europe, increasingly strong and standing together – partly as a result of a shared need to face the turn to the right across European politics. Thus, while ENAR’s position could potentially have become hemmed in between the Commission vs. member organisations’ expectations, the organisation seems to have successfully met this challenge and ‘become smarter in ways to get our point across’, as the Director expressed it.

Tackling intersectionality?

In this section, focus is on ENAR's position as potentially hemmed in between willingness to raise awareness of intersectional discrimination versus potential compartmentalisation of individual discrimination strands within the Commission. Crenshaw's original observations about the lack of attention to intersecting discrimination in terms of gender and race (Crenshaw 1989, 1991), were to some extent based on her insights as lawyer into how the judicial and social system was incapable of tackling needs and interests of people (*in casu* black women) who did not 'fit' one category or the other. As she argued, there was a need to 'recognise as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual' (Crenshaw 1991, 1241-1242). It is this question about 'systemic isolation' which I wish to address here. In an article on collaboration within the European Social Platform^{ix}, Cullen writes that

EU practices including operating competing policy units for different dimensions of inequality, poverty and discrimination militate against NGO efforts at cross-issue mobilization, generating instead competitive and exclusive dynamics. In this environment, organizations who differ in ideological terms along fault lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and able-bodiedness invest in protecting their constituents from displacement from the EU policy agenda rather than collaboration (2010, 329-330).

Prima facie, such an argument indicates 'systemic isolation' of discrimination strands, and thus it would seem difficult for an organisation like ENAR to advance arguments for protection of groups like for example 'homosexual migrants', 'disabled refugees' or 'female Roma' or any other type of intersectional constituency one may think of as potentially falling victim of being 'perceived as an isolated individual' like the ones Crenshaw encountered during her research. As Cullen points out, and others with her, EU institutions traditionally prefer to interact with one civil society actor when developing anti-discrimination policies (see also Strid 2009; Kantola 2010; Pristed Nielsen 2013b). This may block the way for intersectional approaches to furthering anti-discrimination, as this preference does not enhance possibilities for making pluralised claims heard through civil society consultation (Rolandsen Agustín 2008). Further, Lombardo and Verloo argue that

This model of coordination and consultation whereby inequalities are treated separately thus does not favour the mainstreaming of gender into multiple discrimination policy proposals or the mainstreaming of sexual orientation, race, age, disability and religion into proposals to tackle gender inequality (2009, 485).

As Verloo writes (2006), such an institutional framework may lead to a ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of presenting one’s ‘own’ discrimination strand as representing the most abject group. Such an approach would obviously fly in the face of what Crenshaw called for so many years ago, namely to recognise the social and systemic nature of the problem of intersectional discrimination. Despite such reservations by academics – both those basing their work on empirical evidence and those more theoretically inspired – I found no indication of such compartmentalisation or ‘Oppression Olympics’ (Hancock 2007) when interviewing ENAR staff. On the contrary, they spoke about ‘quite a strong willingness to cooperate and to develop this kind of solidarity-kind of approach’ within the Social Platform, and one of them said:

We work with the European Women’s Lobby, with ILGA Europe, with the Youth Forum, with AGE, with the European Disability Forum, to really try and... because we realise that it’s basically legislation that affects all of our constituents, and that if we work together, we will be able to be more effective, and to get our advocacy messages forward better.

I asked directly ‘do you experience any kind of blockers within the Commission, or within DG Justice, if you try to advance this [arguments about intersectional discrimination]?’ To which I received the answer:

No, no, never. I think on the contrary, they would rather be eager that we do it. But their understanding of intersectionality is very limited. It is only with gender. Which is good. But for us, we say no, it needs to be all possible intersectionalities, [...] we always remind them of that. [...] we have been trying to give for example concrete examples of where the policies are really – well, trying to cross different grounds with real cases, so they understand the point. But I mean, in the structures of the call, in the application, it is only with gender.

Looking at academic literature, it is striking that also here, much of the debate about intersectionality is ‘only with gender’, as phrased by this ENAR staff member and as evidenced by the quote from Lombardo and Verloo above (2009). Given how debates about intersectionality in European scholarship have mainly predominated within gender research circles, this is not surprising, as intersectionality is referred to as having acquired ‘paradigmatic status in gender studies’ (Pristed Nielsen 2013a, 278). Recently, however, Lombardo and Rolandsen Agustín (2016), have pointed out how questions of intersectionality are gradually becoming more articulated and embryonically inclusive of new types of identity markers within EU policy making. As they analyse policies on gender based violence, the frames whose existence they document, are, however, also always ‘only with gender’.

This prioritisation of gender - which is apparently taking place among both EU institutions and European scholars – is relatable to the trajectories of the concept of intersectionality. This is addressed by Davis (2009), who explains that intersectionality in its US context is most clearly associated with critical race studies and a related political project of uncovering the material consequences of racism. In most of Europe, however, ‘appeals to gender equality historically precede appeals to anti-racism’ (Prested Nielsen 2013a, 280). Hence, gender equality policies enjoy historical primacy within the EU – which may be an explanation for ‘gender’ apparently being a stable supply in any discussion of intersectional discrimination.

Current staff at ENAR, however, gave a number of concrete examples of how they were attempting to work on intersectional discrimination – with or without gender being part of the intersection in question. For example, they referred to a project developed with ILGA

Because we noticed that actually far-right and xenophobic parties try to kind of stir hostility between groups as well. The idea was to show that actually those groups stand together, and that pitting the LGBT group against for example the Muslim community, it doesn’t work in practice.

Crenshaw herself underscored how the ‘theory’ of intersectionality was always very material in its consequences, and hence she advocated a strategy to ‘advance the telling’ of the locations where these consequences make themselves felt (Crenshaw 1991, 1242). Such a strategy of ‘advancing the telling’ seemed an integral part of much of ENAR’s work, despite potential ‘systemic isolation’ of discrimination issues. As explained by a staff member:

Of course the expectation is definitively, when we go to meetings with the DG Justice [...] that we focus on racism and specific forms of racism, and that is of course still our core focus, obviously. But whenever there is a possibility to raise other issues, I mean, we try to do it as much as possible and also for example issues linked where other groups are concerned, we also try to have joint meetings.

The interviewee mentioned that such joint meetings with DG Justice had for example involved ILGA-Europe and AGE. This was confirmed by another staff member: ‘the closest organisation with which we have always had the stronger collaboration is ILGA’ adding that ‘at the level of secretariats [of the Brussels based anti-discrimination organisations], we are absolutely all the time in conversation, we work together on many projects’. These points about collaboration among NGOs, including joint meetings with DG Justice is corroborated by interview evidence related in Ruzza (2014, 76)

The notion that there is or has ever been a sensation of partaking in an ‘Oppression Olympics’ among ENAR staff seems hard to defend. For example, already the very first ENAR report refers in its introductory remarks to how ‘In 2000, the European Network Against Racism plans to carry out a campaign together with the associated partners [...] working to prevent discrimination against disabled people, elderly, homosexuals, migrants, minorities and women’ (Chopin 1999, i). Reading this particular passage aloud to the first Director of ENAR during the interview, she remarked how

We had some five-six years of cooperation amongst the directors of the various networks, which was absolutely brilliant. We met each other quite regularly, and we had a very open channel of communication [...]. We had very easy communication, because we all felt that we were not in competition with each other, we all had our budget, we did not need to compete for the same funding.

It has not, however, always been smooth sailing – particularly not with the EWL, although Sierra (2002) includes evidence of how ENAR and EWL were involved side by side in the process preparing the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001. One of the staff members of ENAR said

We have been seeking [...] to forge a strong alliance with EWL for all sorts of reasons. [...] but there have been, and there are still, important blockages [...] and we hope that this will change, there is *huge* resistance from some people on their board, for really ideological issues sometimes (original emphasis).

While such a statement does call for qualification, significant numbers of scholarly articles have highlighted the inability of EWL to include considerations of women’s diversity (see for example Hoskyns 1991; Williams 2003; Pudrovska and Ferree 2004; Rolandsen Agustín 2011; Bygnes 2013), indicating that there has been some resistance.

Concluding discussion

ENAR in many ways seems to have been able to successfully straddle potentially opposing demands for its operations. This goes for demands and expectations stemming from outside forces – in particular responding to altered practices and expectations when being transferred from referring to one DG to another. How well the organisation has been able to respond to grassroots’ demands and expectations is another issue. But the fact that the organisation has successfully (in terms of the current number of members) revoked its

membership base and all members now pay an - albeit small - membership fee, does indicate nationally based backing for ENAR.

The organisation has undergone a slow but steady increase in terms of size and output, and given the financial and political climate during recent years, this is perhaps one of ENAR's most remarkable achievements: to be able to uphold a banner of anti-racism in an EU increasingly marked by a political turn to the right. Despite fluctuations, set-backs and staff turnover, the organisation has only had three Directors in the more than 15 years of its existence, which is a remarkable achievement given that 'Brussels is a very, very quick paced place. Run, run, run, all the time, and normal people can do that for 3, 4, 5 years, and then you do something else', as one interviewee put it. This does not mean that the Director did not worry about the organisation's future – especially the rise of the far-right across Europe in general and the number of far-right MEPs specifically, caused great concern about the overall support for the European anti-racist movement. As the Director phrased it, 'you are trying to just flex your muscle, hoping that you never have to prove that you have the muscle'.

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- ⁱ Searching the four large databases Web of Science, Scopus, Academic Search Premier and Proquest in Feb 2017 (search phrase “European Network Against Racism OR ENAR AND racism”, limited to scholarly peer reviewed journals) led to identification of 68 unique results, the majority of which, however, are included because publications by ENAR appear in the reference list or because ENAR is mentioned as one example among many. ENAR and its work has not been the object of analysis per se in any academic publication I am aware of, with the exception of Pristed Nielsen (2013b) and Schnyder (2016a, 2016b). Bouget and Prouteau (2002), Ruzza (2011b, 2014) and Fella and Ruzza (2013) contain analyses of the relationship between civil society actors (including specifically ENAR) and EU institutions, whereas Cullen’s (2010) analysis of The Social Platform specifically mentions contestation between ENAR and EWL.
- ⁱⁱ These interviews were made by a colleague on a 6th framework programme collaborative research project ‘Eurosphere’. Full transcriptions are in the author’s possession.
- ⁱⁱⁱ These interviews were made by the author.
- ^{iv} <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2004-3619&language=EN>, accessed February 10th 2017. As this answer to a question posed in the EP reveals, ENAR received 89-90% of its total funding from the Commission during the years 2001-2004. The most recent year for which information is available is 2015, in which the percentage financed by the EC was 78.98% (ENAR 2015, 17).
- ^v http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/3._finances_balance_sheet_final.pdf, accessed February 10th 2017. This signifies a slight decrease in EC funding, as for example in 2004 ENAR received 957,465.56 Euro (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2004-3619&language=EN>), and in 2013 it was 854.361 Euro (ENAR 2013, 15)
- ^{vi} <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2007-0117&language=EN>, accessed February 10th 2017
- ^{vii} <http://www.enar-eu.org/Staff-221>, accessed February 10th 2017
- ^{viii} These three questions may be found in EP Parliamentary Questions E-006360/2012, E-6049/07 and E-008736/2015 respectively. The remaining list of critical questions up until January 2017 includes: E-004187/2012, E-004426/2012, E-0117/07, E-3619/04, E-6043/07, E-6349/07, E-0119/07, E-0471/09, E-6044/07, E-6046/07, E-4853/09, E-001174/2015 and E-005994/2016, most of which have been raised by the first two MEPs. The list of EP questions including a positive mentioning of ENAR is (in contrast) extremely short: E-010044/2011, E-010169/2012 and E-000093/2012. Hence, out of a

total of 19 questions to the Commission directly related to ENAR and raised in the EP during the period Jan 2004-Jan 2017, only 3 include positive comments.

- ^{ix} The Social Platform is a collaborative network organisation, including members such as ENAR, ILGA-Europe, EWL, and a number of other anti-discrimination organisations, but also anti-poverty groups, labour unions, environmental groups and more.

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