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“The future of EU migration and integration policy”

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Migration issues are high on the policy agenda of the European Union. But it wasn't always like this: "*solidarity*" has been a recent turning-point, a success story of the last two years. The EU now sees migration as one of the most visible challenges of globalisation. At the informal European summit last month, Europe's leaders again discussed migration, confirming their determination to develop a common policy on migration based on the milestones established in Tampere in 1999.

Europe needs migration

The approach we are developing is realistic – it acknowledges the fact that international migration is part and parcel of today's world and that the central question is how to manage it effectively. Immigration has both a poverty and a richness strand: poverty is portrayed by the waves of illegal immigrants, victims of human trafficking, desperate and ready to risk everything in search of a better life.

This poverty has to be tackled and harnessed, and turned into richness. This in turn reflects Europe's need for selective immigration to continue its economic development and rise to the challenge of globalisation. This is the richness we imagine when looking at what the Americans have achieved, admittedly over the years and after fierce civil rights battles.

The EU needs immigration. In spite of the recent enlargement, which has brought the total population to some 490 million, the number of people living in the EU is set to decline in the coming decades and by 2050 a third will be over 65 years of age. The need for workers in many Member States, including the UK, is already evident in a number of sectors. This demand will grow as we lose 20 million workers between now and 2050.

However, immigration alone is not the solution to ageing populations. Higher net immigration will not exempt European policy-makers from implementing structural and other changes if they are to cope with the impact of ageing populations, which is a challenge not to be underestimated.

A Multi-faceted European Strategy

Europe's strategy must respond to these challenges and is, therefore, multi-faceted. On the one hand, the phenomenon of illegal immigration is being tackled by improving border controls, but also by promoting cooperation with third countries in many areas. These include negotiating readmission agreements and return policies, but also working together on issues such as the prevention of illegal migration and minimising the effects of the brain drain. We therefore have to look at how we can turn this latter phenomenon into more of a circular process.

But this formidable challenge encompasses both illegal and legal immigrants, because it is always the same people who are the driving forces. We thus have to turn a phenomenon organised by traffickers and terrorists into a government-driven campaign. On the other hand, a key objective is better management of legal immigration, with particular attention paid to the needs of the diverse labour markets of the Member States. This includes exploring the potential of migration to fill any needs for temporary and seasonal work and the viability of circular migration. At the same time we are extending our integration measures for immigrants lawfully residing in the EU. There can be no immigration without integration. We cannot think our work is finished once we have what were illegal flows of immigrants under control. It will then be the turn of integration policy.

External dimension of migration

In my view, an essential aspect of the EU's approach is the development of partnerships with third countries on migration issues, with the aim of making our policies on legal migration and integration more firmly entrenched in the EU's external policy and stepping up the fight against illegal migration.

A very significant change in the last couple of years, whose importance should not be underestimated, has been the merging of the migration and development

agendas, both within the EU and at international level. In this area I think I can say that the Commission has played a pioneering role.

The external dimension of migration has gained particular visibility in recent years and has now become a permanent fixture of our migration policy.

2010: Achieving a common European asylum system

At the same time, it is essential to complete the Common European Asylum System **by 2010**, as called for by the Council. I will be issuing a **Green Paper** – a consultation instrument between institutional and other stakeholders that the Commission uses before taking decisions in any given sector - in June this year on the future of the common asylum policy. The aim is to stimulate a wide debate among all interested parties. Asylum has been on the decline in recent years and it now needs some form of selective management and harmonisation: asylum is traditionally a pillar of "fraternity" between free societies, highlighting the difference between freedom and dictatorship.

The Council has set the ambitious objective of establishing a common asylum procedure and uniform status for everyone in the EU who is in need of international protection. I will be particularly attentive to the need for the EU to have an asylum system which guarantees **high standards** and at the same time ensures that there is **solidarity** between the Member States with respect to asylum seekers. Here again, the external aspect of asylum policy will play an important role.

Border control and the challenge of illegal immigration

Controlling the external borders of the EU has come in for a lot of attention as a result of enlargement, security issues and increasing migratory pressures. Daily arrivals of boats on the shores of the southern Member States in successive summers have kept this issue high on the political agenda. What I want to see is a European coastguard: a single flag for our own security and to help save lives at risk.

In less than a year we have seen the start of much concrete action. For the first time Member States are working together in joint operations to protect the EU's external borders, in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, under the coordination of the Borders Agency (FRONTEX).

At the same time I must stress that the problem of the arrival of illegal migrants on the shores of the Member States will not be solved over night. This needs long-term action to address the root causes of migration and exploit the positive links that exist between migration and development. A long-term commitment from all sides will also be required. The two Communications I issued in December last year on the management of the EU's external maritime borders and on the Global Approach to Migration one year on provide new responses to these issues.

Fighting illegal employment

An important aspect of fighting illegal immigration in the EU, in my view, is preventing the illegal employment of immigrants. Work "on the black" distorts competition, on the one hand, but condemns immigrants to slavery, on the other, in the very countries where they should be free: it puts them in the hands of the lowlifes. They become nameless illegal immigrants for the would-be host country, outside the "social welfare" circuit, effectively homeless and outside the law.

Decisions to migrate are based on an individual's assessment of a number of push factors, such as unemployment, permanent low-wage levels and armed conflicts to name just a few, and pull factors, such as the informal sector and employment with higher wages, political stability, maintenance of the rule of law, effective protection of human rights, and different labour market conditions.

The fact is that many illegal migrants are able to find work in the hidden economy. This shows that there is a clear link between illegal migrants and the labour market.

Within the EU, the shadow economy is estimated to be between 7-16% of EU GDP, although this is by no means entirely made up of illegal migrants. Illegal migrants work mostly in low-skilled sectors such as construction, agriculture, catering, cleaning and housekeeping.

Often illegal migrants are hired for the so-called "3 D"- jobs (dirty, dangerous and demanding work), which domestic workers are not keen to do. The tendency for illegal migrants to be employed in the low-skilled shadow economy is not only due to the fact that they do not have the appropriate status, qualifications or the required language skills for other jobs.

Skilled illegal migrants may also find it difficult to work in the sector in which they were trained not only because they lack appropriate work permits, but also because their qualifications are not recognised within the EU.

For these reasons, I have decided to put forward an EC Directive designed to harmonise sanctions against employers who offer work to illegally residing third-country nationals. This proposal will be ready for presentation by the end of May 2007.

A global approach

However, border control and fighting illegal migration needs to be part of a broader strategy. This explains why both Member States and the EU now put particular emphasis on the need for a 'global approach'. For many years immigration has found little "solidarity" among Member States, but once on the agenda the complexity of the phenomenon was plain to see, with the "external dimension" inevitably soon being accompanied by "development" issues.

The aim is to formulate comprehensive and coherent policies, addressing the whole range of migration-related issues of interest both to the EU and to our partners. It was adopted at the last Council meeting of the UK Presidency in December 2005 following discussions at the Hampton Court summit earlier that year. It brings new policy areas into the immigration debate, in particular development, and relies on close cooperation with countries of origin and transit for it to be implemented.

The agenda established by the European Council for this global approach is ambitious and includes both priority actions to increase cooperation among Member States and activities to be undertaken in partnership with third countries.

Africa and the Mediterranean were the first priorities but countries to the east of the EU are now in their slipstream. The measures taken cover a wide range of areas: legal and illegal immigration, integration, refugee protection, combating trafficking, improving the links between migration and development.

We need to work much more closely with third countries and we are developing a number of new tools to this effect:

- We will assist those countries that are interested in putting together detailed *Migration Profiles* to ensure that all the relevant information is available on which to base practical measures.
- We will build *Cooperation Platforms* bringing together third countries, EU Member States and international organisations to ensure effective migration management.
- And we will create *Migration Support Teams* (MISTs) consisting of experts from EU Member States to provide assistance to third countries that ask for it.

We will use this link with countries of origin to make Europe better known, especially what it has to offer, but also its values and its ways of life. We have to prepare potential immigrants to make a conscious choice. On the one hand, we will highlight what is on offer and, to a certain extent, "choose" who we want to have. But we also have to think about "being chosen" ourselves and encourage potential immigrants "to become European".

The challenge of managing legal migration

In terms of legal migration, it is important to emphasise that implementing the *Policy Plan on Legal Migration* will be a priority over the next few years.

I realise that the development of a common approach in this area will need to be progressive and flexible and to match the prerogatives of the Member States, such as their right to determine the number of third-country workers ("volume") admitted for employment purposes.

Nonetheless, I believe that this is necessary to maintain and improve economic growth in the EU. It is essential, for example, for Europe to become a real magnet for highly skilled immigrants. We have to push this idea of being the sole player to overcome the challenge of globalisation. Given our negative image of the impact of regularisation throughout the Schengen area – highlighting as it does the limits of the sovereignty of each Member State in their immigration policies – we now have to change to a positive tack and gradually develop a common policy, particularly in our handling of legal immigration. This is why later this year I will be proposing a directive on the conditions of admission to the EU for high-skilled workers. This may include the possibility of an EU "blue card" or other measures to facilitate mobility between the Member States to meet the changing needs of the highly qualified. In this context I recognise that we need to ensure that our policies do not exacerbate the phenomenon of brain drain and that they include adequate safeguards.

There will also be a directive on the rights of legal immigrants in employment, which is another important priority for 2007. Here the aim is to put forward a common set of basic rights, in an effort to avoid disparities between Member States and protect immigrant workers from exploitation.

Legislation on the admission of seasonal workers will follow. This will give us an opportunity to put new ideas into practice for promoting circular or intermittent migration, within the context of our migration and development agenda.

Better management of the legal movement of people between the EU and third countries is an area where cooperation with our partners in the developing world is essential. I will soon be making new proposals in this area, as called for by the European Council last December.

At the Tripoli Conference in November 2006, I launched a new proposal, which, if accepted, could be a good compromise between the need for Member States to maintain a certain degree of jurisdiction over economic migration and the need for Europe increase its role in this area.

This would be a further step forward if the Commission could directly negotiate with third countries on the basis of the labour market needs of the Member State.. To put it more simply, Member States will continue to determine the number of jobs available in their respective labour markets and identify what categories are in demand.

The Commission will collect all of these "national figures" and use them when negotiating with the authorities of a given third country. This would give the Commission a further tool for use when discussing the broad spectrum of migration issues, including the fight against illegal immigration.

For this proposal to be successful, it is also important to have common European admission procedures for the different categories of workers. The European Commission should be able to tell third-country nationals not only where they can find jobs in Europe but also what administrative procedures they need to go through to enter Europe's labour market legally.

The Challenge of integration

But as I said, there is no immigration without integration. This is no easy task in that national differences make it difficult to opt for a single policy; experimental models are in chaos; and, unlike what we Europeans have experienced or even caused, last century in particular, in the many new worlds overseas, we are now faced with the idea of immigration that "is afraid of" and "rejects" integration. And this does not affect just the first waves of immigrants but also the second and third. Another key priority over the next few years will be to do more to help migrants integrate, as highlighted in the Common Agenda for Integration in September 2005. National policies will be encouraged – but common goals have been set. These respect different traditions, cultures and religions while fully complying with national and EU laws, and with the absolute value of human life and dignity, for example, equality between men and women.

In the Hague Programme, the European Council called for the establishment of a European framework as a means of underscoring integration policies. At the core of this framework is a series of eleven common basic principles, which were adopted by the JHA Council at the end of 2004 and which form the basis of the European approach to integration today.

These principles give a first idea of what we mean by integration in the EU. They set a number of initial objectives and they identify key measures in areas such as employment, education, respect for diversity, and dialogue between citizens. Support for our European cities, which are in the front line where integration is concerned, in their efforts to put these principles into practice is a particular concern of mine.

Financial leverage

The EU already finances activities in all of these areas via a number of different programmes. The 2007-2013 financial framework makes substantial funds available to support Member States efforts. In addition to the European Refugee Fund, there will be three new funds: for Border Control, for Integration and for Return measures.

Meeting the challenges

So these are the highlights of EU policy over the next few years. We are developing a European approach to migration management, which, I believe, gives us the best prospects for minimising the negative effects of migration and for maximising the benefits for all concerned - the EU, the countries from which migrants come and the migrants themselves.

To implement these policies, the Commission and the Member States must work together to boost Europe's response to the challenges ahead. A long-term commitment from all sides will be required.

As stated in the Hague Programme, "*international migration will continue*". For our part, we have to turn what is for us a rather passive phenomenon, and one which we see solely in terms of poverty and distress, into a positive and ultimately enriching experience. Without a Community policy, however, it will be increasingly difficult for any one country to successfully tackle this constantly evolving challenge on its own. The Commission is there to help.