



THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF MIGRATION

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Final Address

by

Antonio Vitorino

European Commissioner responsible for Justice and Home Affairs

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today at the closing of this conference which I understand has been one and a half days of intensive discussion. A number of very thoughtful and challenging papers have been presented by the experts. I would particularly like to add my thanks to the OECD secretariat for their contributions to the debate.

This has been a very timely initiative and I want to stress here the importance which I attach to the topic. Labour migration is not a new phenomenon for Europe, we know that. What is new in the current phase is the context in which it's taking place - demographic and economic - and the new balance between these phenomena which now exists between the - soon to be enlarged European Union - and the developing countries from which most migrants come.

We need to acknowledge that immigration has been and will be beneficial not only to the European economy but that it has also added to the cultural diversity which characterises European society today. Studies show that properly managed legal immigration also generally has positive effects on the countries of origin. We are now entering a new phase where immigration is likely to become one of the strategic instruments needed to develop the European economy.

Developing the full potential which migration can bring to the Union requires new approaches, not only in the management of migration flows but also to successfully integrate migrants into society.

The framework for developing these policies already exists – it was set out at the European Council in Tampere. The Union has committed itself to developing a common immigration policy.

The Tampere Council set out the basic elements of this common policy and I want to repeat them here because they constitute a package which need to be implemented together.

There are four main strands:

1) A comprehensive approach which acknowledges the need to deal simultaneously with all the different aspects of migration and which tries to find a balance between humanitarian and economic admission. The Seville Council underlined the need for this balanced approach emphasising the need for measures on legal immigration and on integration to go hand in hand with the reinforcement of action to combat illegal migration.

2) equal treatment of migrants based on comparable rights with specific integration policies;

3) the development of cooperation with countries of origin focussed not only on better ways to manage legal migration and to reduce illegal movements, but also on how to minimise the negative and maximise the positive impacts of emigration;

4) a common asylum system which provides protection to those who genuinely need it.

This is a very broad and ambitious programme, it will take time to put into effect, but it is a package of linked actions and labour migration must be developed within this context. We are taking a phased approach to the task. I have already put on the Council table all the legislation required to create the basic framework for legal admission common to all Member States. I would emphasise that this is a basic framework of minimum standards - some would say it does not go far enough - but even so the Council has not yet reached agreement on any of the proposals. I am hopeful, however, that the Seville deadlines will be met.

What is important is that this is a first step, and that the legislation is based on the establishment of rights and responsibilities. In this I have taken as my reference the Charter of Fundamental Rights which, if incorporated into a future Constitutional Treaty, will provide a really solid basis for implementing equal treatment for migrants.

Two of these directives are of particular importance for labour migration. The Directive on admission for employment will be a major step forward in helping potential labour migrants to understand how the legal channels for admission to the Union operate and in creating a level playing field. I have to say that the Member States have not so far shown much enthusiasm for this directive. I want to be clear - the proposal has no impact on numbers - there will be no European quotas. We are, however, increasingly going to be competing with other countries (particularly the US and Canada) for the people we need. We can benefit from a new European approach to recruitment which this directive opens up: greater cooperation between consulates in third countries - why not one-stop shops for recruitment? We are already seeing increasing interest in our relationships at the European level with third countries for discussion of migration issues on the numbers and skills needed. Within the context of the European Employment Strategy we need to review the way in which we recruit migrants.

The second directive I want to mention concerns the status of long-term residents. This establishes a series of rights. Among these is the right, under certain conditions, to move to another Member State to work. There have been difficult negotiations on this text in the Council. I think, however, that it is clear that if we are to realise the full potential of immigration to meet labour shortages in the future and to promote the European economy - we must provide migrants with greater mobility within the Union.

I would like to say a few words about the second phase of my approach to developing the common policy and the one to which I will be giving high priority for the remainder of my mandate as Commissioner. This concerns the practical implementation of the principle of equal treatment. For let us be clear there will be no social cohesion if we have a two speed Europe - a Europe with first and second class citizens depending on ethnic origin.

The integration of migrants is to my mind the greatest challenge of the common policy on migration. The success of the policy depends on it. Integrating migrants into society is both a matter of social cohesion and a pre-requisite for economic growth and greater competitiveness. And yet there is no agreement on a common definition nor even on the objectives for integration policies, still less on the way to measure and monitor them.

I think the key factor is to see integration as a process - a dynamic and two way process that places demands both on the host society and on the individuals concerned. What is needed is to facilitate the process by developing integration policies that enable the individual and his or her family to become a part, not just of the labour market, but of the social, cultural and political life in our countries.

I believe a stronger link between immigration and integration policies on the one hand and national employment strategies on the other will foster further progress in obtaining the goal of full employment as set forth in the European Employment Strategy. New guidelines for 2003 taking into account the

importance of labour migration and containing goals and initiatives to improve the integration of immigrants are now under consideration. These will be of crucial importance if we are to respond adequately to demographic trends, globalisation and enlargement.

Labour migration and integration – these are two of the key areas of the common immigration policy which we are developing. But they are only part of the overall comprehensive approach – and here I return to the Tampere Council. Facilitating labour migration must be balanced by vigorous policies to prevent illegal migration and especially trafficking. There has been a great deal of progress here in the last two years at the European level with the adoption of three important Action Plans: on illegal immigration, on external border control and on developing a Community return policy for illegal residents.

We must also ensure that we develop an adequate protection regime and again progress is now being made with the establishment of European directives which provide minimum standards. It should not be forgotten that those whose applications are accepted and many of those admitted to the EU for humanitarian reasons, notably under family reunion arrangements, are also potential members of the labour force and represent a resource whose full potential is not always realised.

Our dialogue at EU level with third countries on migration issues is also developing and will have an increasing impact on the sources and patterns of migration flows and in particular on the better management of these flows.

Clearly there are many challenges ahead but this is an area where we must succeed. Your discussions will be a valuable input to the development of our thinking and the shaping of the policies which are necessary. I would like to thank you all for your contributions and for your commitment.