

Speech by the President of the European Parliament opening the Parliamentary Conference on Policy Coherence for Development and Migration (12/02/2009 - Brussels, European Parliament)

Mr Chairman of the Committee on Development, Josep Borrell,
Commissioner Margot Wallström,
Mr Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Mr Mario Amano,

Dear colleagues from the national parliaments and the European Parliament,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

I am delighted to be able to welcome you all today to this important parliamentary conference at the European Parliament.

The aim of today's conference is to find ways to achieve policy coherence in the interests of development and migration and to raise awareness of the great economic and social importance of migration policies for the future of both industrialised and developing countries.

For this reason, I am especially pleased to be able to welcome so many national parliament representatives to this conference. As President of the European Parliament, I should like to place particular emphasis on the significance of close cooperation between the European Parliament and national parliaments from all over the world in addressing issues of global concern.

As parliamentarians, we bear particular responsibility for people in our countries and for a peaceful future based on trust and constructive cooperation.

It is our responsibility to act together and help create synergies between migration and development, and to play a key role in managing the benefits and challenges of migration for development.

Parliamentarians can be helpful in exerting their influence on governments to analyse the impacts of political measures taken by the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on development and migration, and thereby ensuring that these measures are coherent and that governments honour their commitments.

Parliamentarians can push governments to formulate consistent national positions and speak with one voice in international bodies.

Parliamentarians can strengthen awareness and influence their voters. It is therefore important that they have access to facts, analysis and experiences regarding the impact of migration policies on development in migrants' countries of origin.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, migration is one of the most significant global socio-political challenges of our present time. People are on the move in every part of the world for many reasons, including increasing economic inequalities, extreme poverty, the resurgence of ethnic, religious and tribal fundamentalism, conflicts and wars.

As a result, migration is now becoming a priority issue on the political and social agenda. There can be no doubt that any political approach aimed at structuring and managing migration is fundamentally linked to development policy: migration has an impact on development and development has an impact on migration!

Today, however, while still aware of the root causes and negative effects of migration, the potential positive contribution of migration for development has been recognised. Migration, if properly managed, can contribute to the reduction of poverty and economic growth in the developing countries of origin.

These countries could benefit from reduced pressure on their labour markets, from remittances sent by migrants and from the return of specialists bringing newly acquired skills and knowledge to their countries of origin. In addition, diaspora organisations can strengthen trade relations and cooperation between home and host societies.

But, if poorly managed, migration can also have downsides for developing countries that, for instance, do not benefit from temporary or permanent return of skills and experience. One of the most obvious negative effects of migration is the loss of knowledge and skills, the 'brain drain'.

Currently more than 55% of Nigerian nationals working outside their home country, 49% of Zambian nationals and 40% of the nationals of Benin, Chad, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Lesotho, Namibia, Tanzania and South Africa, are highly skilled professionals. Many Caribbean countries have lost more than 70% of their highly skilled labour force, those with more than twelve years of completed schooling.

The 'brain drain' is seen most acutely in the health sector. 60% of doctors trained in Ghana are working in Canada, Britain and the United States and fewer than 10% of all Zambian doctors trained in their home country still practise there today.

The UN has estimated that over the next decade Africa will need to train an additional one million healthcare professionals.

This 'brain drain' challenge has a devastating impact on economic and social development in these countries, particularly affecting the capacity of developing countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in areas such as education and health.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this light, our great challenge is to ensure that migration contributes to development both in the Member States of the European Union and the OECD and in developing countries themselves. Industrialised countries' needs for labour migration must therefore be reconciled with the need for poverty eradication in developing countries. We must find ways to exploit this double potential.

In order to do that, the European Union and OECD countries must first and foremost better coordinate their migration and development policies. To this end, the European Union reaffirmed its 'commitment to promoting policy coherence for development' in its 'European Consensus on Development' of December 2005.

It will seek to ensure 'that the EU shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in all policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries, and that these policies support development objectives'. Migration is one of the twelve areas where policy coherence for development should be promoted.

Policy coherence for development in the area of migration means:

- adjusting national development and migration policies to each other;
- facilitating cooperation between countries of origin and host countries;
- establishing national migration policies and programmes consistent with international development strategies, standards and objectives (such as those reflected in the United Nations Millennium Declaration).

Thus, coherence needs to be approached at different levels and involve different stakeholders.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that migration is both a common challenge and a great opportunity for everyone – for developing countries and for the countries of the European Union and the OECD. Appropriate responses can and must be best found by working together.

To this end, dialogue on policy coherence for development and migration between sending and receiving countries should be further enhanced.

Today's High-Level Parliamentary Conference that has brought us all together here in the European Parliament is a further step in this dialogue on development and migration between industrialised and developing countries.

I hope this conference will help us to build a better understanding and greater awareness of policy coherence for development in the sphere of migration.

I would like to wish all of you fruitful discussions at the conference today.

Thank you very much!