

**OECD HIGH LEVEL POLICY FORUM ON MIGRATION
Paris, 1-2 December 2014**

**Intervention of the Minister of Interior of Greece, Mr Argyris Ntinopoulos,
in Session 2:**

BUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN MIGRATION ISSUES

Dear President, Esteemed Colleagues,

One of the main challenges that politicians and policy makers are faced with nowadays is a deficit of public confidence in migration and integration policies at both the national and international level.

This lack of confidence is one of the obstacles for governments to achieve broad consensus on the policies to be implemented with a view to tackle migration issues and effectively address relevant problems in the field.

The same holds true for the rise of racism and xenophobia in Europe as recently seen in the polls of the recent European elections. These phenomena are greatly influenced by the portrait of migrants that a number of mainstream media promote and by the discourse that several populist political parties use on migration and on the risks that migrants entail for the prosperity and the security of citizens.

Public perceptions are often shaped by the media and certain political groups which fuel anti-migrant feelings through negative stereotyping, banners and

signals based on narratives and myths which are not knowledge and data based. They are exploiting public fears for the on-going radical changes of our modern world and for the "otherness", the 'strangers' who, according to xenophobic arguments, violate national territories, aiming destroying national identities.

The most well known fictions about the dangers emanating from migration take advantage of the fears of ordinary people experiencing the effects of the international economic crisis, such as the high rates of unemployment, the regression of the welfare state and the challenges that the globalisation and the multiculturalism represent for national identities. "Migrants are stealing our jobs", "migrants are exploiting our social security and health systems", "migrants are not paying taxes", "migrant children hinder the school achievements of native pupils", "migrants put public health at risk", " the large number of migrants causes the raise of criminality in our societies", etc.

Bombarding the public opinion with such alerting messages provokes hostile feelings, which are quite difficult to change both by political or scientific arguments presenting real data and research-based conclusions.

A recent research in a number of European countries showed that the citizens were not properly informed even about the percentage of migrants residing in their societies. In some cases, they even considered that the migrant population was two times the number of the actual one.

The description of the reality should be the task of experts. Politicians have a much more difficult task as well as the responsibility to come up with solutions, and relevant policies.

What should then be done?

I would suggest four policy axes for achieving the goal of enhancing public confidence and create broad consensus on migration and integration policy:

- ⇒ Provide accurate and formal information about the numbers and the facts on migration, as well as clear and explicit information about relevant policies in the field. Changing mentalities should start from schooling.
- ⇒ Organise awareness-raising campaigns on migration and the benefits of a well-managed migration and integration policy for the host society at economic, social and cultural level.
- ⇒ Organise specific training courses for people working in the media, including migrant journalists, in order to promote diversity in the communication system. An ethical code on how to treat migration issues in a fair and non discriminatory way could further enforce the public confidence on the phenomenon.
- ⇒ Last but not least, launch a public dialogue on how to build public confidence in managing migration and on integration policies with the participation of all stakeholders could contribute to an increased acceptance and support of any reforms which might be indispensable for addressing emerging challenges in the field.

A *sine-qua-non* condition for shaping favourable to migration policy attitudes of the public opinion is the effort to create consensus among the main political parties and to isolate political groups holding hate speech and anti-migrant discourse. **We did that in Greece with the Golden Dawn Party.**

I should stress the need for more action in this direction on an every day basis with a view to implementing the existing legislation on fight against racism and

xenophobia. What is needed for the shaping of a positive public perception, is both a top down and a bottom up approach, involving all interested parties. This is the most demanding task of all and the focus should be put in achieving it.

Before closing, I would like to mention certain projects that the Greek Ministry of Interior has financed through the European Integration Fund, in order to sensitise the Greek society:

- ⇒ awareness-raising campaigns on migration and the trafficking in human beings through the national media,
- ⇒ a project of intercultural training, targeting media and press professionals, and
- ⇒ a series of intercultural training courses for public servants and the staff of municipalities dealing with migration and integration issues aiming at shaping positive public perceptions within the administration and the local authorities with multiplying effects for the whole society.

Our world is rapidly changing, public perceptions should follow short.

Migration was and will probably always be a feature of the international reality. We can not ignore it, we can not stop it, but we can manage it more efficiently. We should learn to live together, maximising the profits and minimising the risks for both migrants and our societies.
