

OECD – High Level Policy Forum on Migration, Paris 1-2/12/2014

Session 2 – “Building public confidence in migration issues”

Chaired by The Hon Mr. Michael WOODHOUSE,
Minister of Immigration, *New Zealand*

Introductory remarks by:

- Mr. Argyris Ntinopoulos, Minister of Interior, *Greece*
- Ms. Solveig Horne, Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, *Norway*
- Mr. Kurt Rohner, State Secretary, *Switzerland**
- Mr. Andrej Spenga, State Secretary, Ministry of Interior, *Slovenia*
- Mr. Osman Günes, Deputy Minister of Interior, *Turkey*
- Mr. Bernard Cazeneuve, Minister of Interior, *France*

***Introductory remarks presented by**

Kurt ROHNER, State Secretary, Ministry of Justice and Police, *Switzerland*

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am especially delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you today about building public confidence in migration issues. Indeed, whatever form migration takes, and even when its outcomes are entirely positive, **public confidence is vital**. Not only is public confidence needed to shape migration policy and ensure its effective implementation, but it is also the key to a greater acceptance of migration and the better integration of migrants in society.

Having said that, public confidence **cannot be decreed** from on high. Confidence-building is a drawn-out process that requires the involvement of multiple **stakeholders**, namely:

- a) **the State**, at all decision-making levels (municipal, cantonal and federal), as well as the **political community** in general. It is only when the people trust the authorities, particularly their government, and credible action is taken, that migration issues stand any chance of enjoying popular support;
- b) **the Migrants** themselves, who also have rights and obligations like everyone else. They can greatly influence public perceptions of migration for the better, or for the worse;

- c) **the Citizens**, because it is they who will be living alongside the new arrivals to the country and will come into contact with them in everyday life;
- d) **the Media**, because of the role they play in framing the political-public debate on migration. Through balanced reporting, they have the power to stimulate a more constructive and measured debate. Yet they also have the power to completely sabotage hard-won efforts by focussing on certain problems and even inflating them out of all proportion;
- e) last but by no means least, **the Economy**. The primary reason why almost all migrants want to settle permanently, whether in Switzerland or elsewhere, is the prospect of work. Any mistrust on the part of the economy, any problems with how the economy functions or the results it delivers, are all factors which have a bearing on the public's perception of migrant workers.

In my country, **public** confidence is especially important. Because of our political system, the Swiss electorate is **permanently and directly involved in shaping migration policy**. As well as electing their political representatives, the Swiss also influence debate upstream and downstream by exercising their right to hold popular initiatives and referendum. Not only does the Public have a say, it has **decision-making powers which ultimately carry more weight than those of the Federal Government** as well. The Swiss electorate accepted the European Union's principle of the free movement of people and has systematically approved successive extensions to the Swiss-EU agreement on the matter. In doing so, the people of Switzerland have affirmed and re-affirmed their commitment to a bilateral approach.

In this year alone, Switzerland has held two **popular initiatives**, both of which centre around the issue of **curbing immigration**. The first initiative, which took place last February, saw the Swiss vote in favour of introducing quotas to control immigration. This outcome has left Switzerland temporarily mired in uncertainty. All migration stakeholders are currently involved in a far-reaching project to reform Switzerland's existing migration policy. But this is not an exclusively Swiss process; of course, the EU will also have its say.

On this matter, the Swiss government's hands are tied, as it has to **respect the voice of the majority**, otherwise it will risk losing public confidence. Yet it also has to balance these demands with EU concerns when re-drafting its migration policy. This means, therefore, that confidence-building is more than a simple domestic matter. It is vital that the public understands that the EU needs Switzerland, and likewise that Switzerland needs the EU. Foreign skilled labour, whether from an EU country or elsewhere, helps drive an economy forward. But our relationship is one of interdependence. To illustrate this point, consider if you will, the following statistic: Switzerland has close to 300,000 cross-border workers, which equates to an annual payroll of 22 billion Swiss francs, or 18 billion euros.

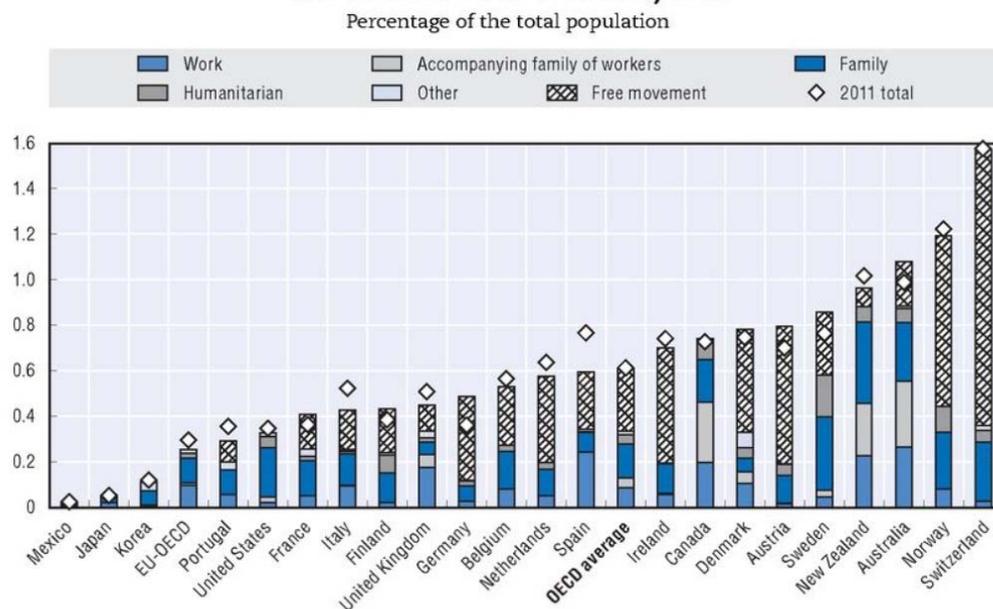
The second popular initiative on the immigration issue was held yesterday only (ECOPOP on November 30). The Swiss electorate voted on a call that would have had massively limited immigration. But a clear majority of 74% rejected this initiative. However, the outcome of the 9th of February remains valid and has become a part of our constitution.

It is not only through the ballot box that public opinion helps frame the migration debate. Members of the Swiss Public are **directly exposed to immigration in their everyday lives:**

One out of four people living in Switzerland holds a foreign passport. In recent times, my country has experienced **positive net migration year by year**. For example, roughly 80,000 persons migrated to Switzerland in 2013, and an equal number again is expected this year. No doubt this immigration helps drive Switzerland’s dynamic economy. But, in a country with a population of more than 8 million, immigration also brings considerable challenges in terms of both day-to-day life and public confidence. To put Switzerland’s situation in perspective, the arrival of 80,000 additional people is equivalent to Germany having to contend year by year with the emergence of a new city much larger than Frankfurt am Main.

To verify this you are invited to have a look at the brand new 'OECD International Outlook 2014', presented this morning to the media in Paris, Figure 1.4 (Permanent immigration by category of entry or status change into selected OECD countries, 2012, percentage of the total population, page 24/425).

Figure 1.4. **Permanent immigration by category of entry or of status change into selected OECD countries, 2012**



Source: OECD International Migration Database.

Again, **public confidence** is not something that can be decreed from on high. Confidence can only be built if the right balance is struck across competing needs and interests. The fundamental aims of migration policy are, as you better know:

- to **support the benefits** of migration, for example, by allowing the economy to source the skills that it needs;
- to **facilitate the integration** of foreigners who have been granted the right to remain permanently in the host country, so that they can make the best use of their skills;
- to make it possible for the various states to meet their **humanitarian migration** commitments.

Confidence-building in relation to migration issues also involves introducing **effective measures** to harness the full potential of the native workforce. This is precisely the route which Switzerland is currently taking. Immigration cannot be the only solution to the labour shortage problem.

At the same time, we need to **address a raft of migration-related problems**, such as illegal immigration and the suggestion that immigration holds down wages. As far as Switzerland is concerned, we need to do **more than simply repeat the mantra of immigration being good** for the economy and development. In fact, such a stance is counterproductive when trying to win the trust of certain segments of the population, particularly those who want to curb growth. This seems at least to be the case in my country.

Finally, I do believe that **migration and mobility should not be ends in themselves**, but should be determined by the needs and demands of society and the world as a whole. This is why we need to impose a framework and limits. The **utopian view of mobility** as an everlasting imperative of a borderless world is in my mind not helpful in building public confidence in migration issues. Entirely demand-driven migration is one of the main determinants of greater public confidence and acceptance, both now and in the future.

Thank You, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen