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CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR MIGRATION AFFAIRS

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**Economic migration, social cohesion
and development: towards an integrated approach**



Right Honourable Terry Davis, Secretary General of
the Council of Europe

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I want to apologise for not being in Kyiv today. I have been looking very much forward to attending this conference on economic migration, social cohesion and social development. This is clearly one of the central challenges our societies face today and will continue to face in the future.

Unfortunately, I have had to cancel my participation at the last moment as a result of obligations arising from recent developments in relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation. But allow me to return to the subject-matter of this Council of Europe Conference of Ministers.

Migration is not an academic concept - nor is it a table with figures showing the flow into a country and the flow out of a country. Migration is first and foremost about people. It is about those people who leave their homes - some voluntarily in search for better lives, some forced by to leave by persecution, by conflicts or by ecological disasters. Migration is about people who enter the wilderness of the unknown and unpredictable, who are faced with unfamiliar realities and contexts, who are often mistreated and frequently discriminated against, who may suffer physical injury and psychological trauma and who sometimes – deliberately or not - infringe the rules. But whatever may be their legal status, migrants are people and must be treated like people – with dreams, wishes, interests and aspirations. In other words, they should be treated as human beings with human rights and human dignity.

Much has already been done to help migrants to integrate and to become fully-fledged citizens of our countries, and this work includes the efforts of the Council of Europe.

But we must do even more to ensure that migrants are treated as individuals whose contributions are valued and recognised, who have a real opportunity to fulfil their aspirations, and whose skills are fully and properly used for the benefit of the countries to which they move. Migrants should be given an opportunity to contribute to social cohesion and social development, and they should participate in the social life of the receiving societies. The mutually enriching dialogue between migrants and the receiving society is particularly important against the background of the increasing number of racist and xenophobic incidents in Europe.

Integrating migrants, supporting their links with their families in their countries of origin, making migration work for social cohesion and social development. These are questions which concern all of us including parliamentarians and local councillors, who are in regular contact with their constituencies and are responsible for making laws and who can use local experience to influence the policies of our Governments. That is why I am delighted that the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the President of the Governing Board of the Council of Europe Development Bank are all in Kyiv today. .

We can talk about migration trends and about migration statistics. But what we are really interested in, at least at the Council of Europe, is the human and social face of migration - the people - not only the migrants, but the people they leave behind and the societies they join, and the challenges which migration poses for all of us.

The rise in xenophobia is one of these challenges, as recently reported by ECRI as we call our European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. Too often we hear overt racism in public discourse and, even more disturbing, we witness incidents of violence against migrants and their families. According to the ECRI reports, this phenomenon is not yet widespread and not all countries are affected, but we need to take concerted action to stamp out the problem before it does spread.

The exclusion of second and third generation immigrants from the labour market is also an issue of concern. In many cases, the children of migrant workers face a bleak future in poor, highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods in our major cities. We cannot hope to build really cohesive societies without their full and active participation. The Report of the Council of Europe High-Level Task Force on Social Cohesion in the 21st century and our White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue are equally clear and emphatic on this point.

Then there is the problem of families dispersed by migration: social orphans – children left behind by their parents who are forced to migrate to earn a living.

Finally, there is the situation of many migrant women, victims of trafficking or victims of inadequate integration policies which have left them alone and isolated.

I believe that it is very important that this conference is taking place in Kyiv. Holding this conference in Ukraine is important because we must grasp the sheer complexity of migration processes in Europe and the specific migration challenges faced by the countries of Eastern Europe – countries of transit as well as countries of destination.

Let us not forget: we are all, one way or another, descendants of migrants. People always have and always will move across borders. Migration and migrants are not threats in themselves. Migration is a challenge which needs to be met and managed – with competence, responsibility, vision and respect. Respect, I say, for the human dignity and the human rights of all the people concerned.