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



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Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to introduce this session's discussion on "economic migration and social cohesion"

Immigration and integration have become strategic issues of enormous proportions for Europe today.

Across Europe there is an intensive search for new ways to achieve the core objectives of integration - equal rights, opportunities and obligations. The very future of Europe's welfare and competitiveness may depend on the success of these efforts.

For some parties it is hard to acknowledge that without immigrants, Europe would be an ageing, stagnating, non-competitive and declining area. And looking ahead, we will need even more immigrants for sustainable social, economic and environmental growth. Without a constant influx to fill the gaps in the labor force it will neither be possible to maintain a competitive, dynamic and knowledge-based economy in Europe nor retain public welfare and elderly care on an acceptable level.

Despite our increased awareness of the significant role migrants play in our economy, it is devastating to realize that we have not been fully successful in our integration policies.

It is not a matter of course that traditionally immigrant-based countries like US, Australia and Canada seem to have relatively more dynamic and growth-oriented economies than many European countries. These countries have opened their borders for labour migration at an early stage. For this reason, they are possibly better prepared and equipped to meet the competition from new "tiger economies" like China and India.

For Europe, it is also a necessity to regard immigration as a lever rather than a problem child.

In Sweden the proportion of the foreign-born has increased from 3 percent in the 1950:s to more than 12 percent of our total population today. Our labour market, our economy and welfare have become remarkably dependent on immigrants and their children. For us, it is out of the question to assume economic growth without migrants. Those who dispute about the cost of immigration need to reconsider their positions in the light of the consequences of closed borders.

We need our immigrants now and we will need even more immigrants in the future.

Europe is currently facing demographic aging. We have an increasing proportion of a retiring post-war baby boom generation. In addition to this we have persistent levels of low fertility, rising life expectancy and a relatively shrinking working age population. This situation entails a serious budgetary challenge to sustain our pension and social security systems.

The size of the aged population is also expected to grow both in relative and absolute terms. For instance the number of persons aged 80 and over is expected to nearly triple, rising from 18 million in 2004 to about 50 million in 2051.

Europe cannot manage the global competition as well as the demographic aging without considerable labour migration and increased female labour force participation.

According to Rainer Muenz Hamburg Institute of International Economics and Erste Bank, the European economic area would need annually 1.3 million migrants at working age between now and 2025 in order to compensate for the declining labour force. And between 2025 and 2050, this number would need to increase to 1.6 million migrants annually. These figures are by no means high estimates.

Possibly we can compensate part of our declining labour force with increased productivity, however to deny the need for new immigrants in order to manage our global competition and sustainable growth is almost as bumping blindfold into our future challenges.

The future Europe we anticipate should not be a "Fortress Europe". It should be a Europe that is welcoming and competitive in attracting skilled labour. In addition to labour migration Europe of course needs to fulfil its responsibilities to humanity and contribute its share in offering shelter to those who are fleeing from war, oppression and tyranny.

Despite our various efforts to create a more cohesive society, the results of our integration policies have in practice proved to be less positive – in some sense a failure - than had been hoped for and expected. This is an area where much remains to be done partly based on lessons from our failures of yesterday and today.

According to Amartya Sen (The economist and Nobel Price Winner) instead of multiculturalism (a richly diverse and integrated society) we have got plural monoculturalism – groups that live side by side but do not interact.

Sen maintains that "Many immigrants and members of ethnic minorities live in ethnic neighbourhoods and enclaves, fraternize primarily with members of their ethnic groups, and maintain some degree of separateness from the larger community."

We have a situation which is some times characterized by increasing differences between natives and immigrants regarding education and employment, more pronounced segregation within housing and a growth of racism and xenophobia.

Achieving sustainable social cohesion is one of our main challenges. All individuals regardless of background must be encouraged to use their full potential, feel secure as members of society and have an optimistic view of their own potential for social mobility as well as for the future of their children.

International organisations and governments try to compensate existing social divergences with different policies, legal instruments, measures, tools and processes that promote social cohesion.

For instance, as we all know, the European Union has proclaimed 2008 "The year of intercultural dialogue" with particular focus on the issues of young people, integration and

immigrants and dialogue between religions. The Council of Europe has adopted a white paper on intercultural dialogue “Living together as equals in dignity” at the beginning of May this year.

The Swedish government launched one year ago a dialogue to promote shared values concerning democracy and human rights. We choose deliberately not to label the dialog as inter-cultural or inter-religious. We preferred instead another wider approach which addresses attitudes to democracy, human rights and gender equality. From our point of view, how to adapt to human rights and its dilemmas should engage everyone be it native Swedes or newcomers.

Immigrants who have come to Sweden in recent years have mostly been refugees. Most of them have fled from dictatorship and terror. They are already democrats in heart having experienced the opposite. But it is not always easy to adapt to new realities in a country where it is natural for women to work, where men share the responsibility for housework and raising of children, where young women enjoy freedom of choice and where corporal punishment is a criminal act.

In several countries we have debates on citizenship which is aimed to promote a sense of belonging to the host society among the immigrant population.

I fully agree on the importance of citizenship, nevertheless I am sceptical to link too much of integration policies and integration measures to citizenship.

In Sweden citizenship is not considered as a major issue compared to many other countries. The reason is due to the small differences in terms of rights, obligations and opportunities between permanent residence permit and citizenship. The only privilege that differ citizens from permanent resident foreigners is the right to vote in national parliamentary elections.

In my opinion the integration process must start early – preferably directly upon arrival. The issue of citizenship comes first after several years.

It is important for newcomers to learn the language, join the labour market and be able to support themselves and their families as soon as possible. Society can provide the necessary tools for integration such as – language courses, complementary education, vocational counseling and employment service etc. But the efforts and responsibilities to integrate should primarily rests on the shoulders of the individual.

Our previous experience in Sweden of a “care- taking” approach has resulted in an unnecessarily drawn out transitional period for individuals to find their feet into the Swedish society. Waiting two years in a state of limbo between language acquisition and joining the labour market has been devastating experience for more recent arrivals. The median time from asylum to working life is as long as seven years.

We are now trying to shift our focus from treating immigrants as objects and passive welfare consumers to empowering individuals to play an active role in shaping their own future. We encourage individuals to take their own initiatives, efforts and responsibilities in order to be self-sustaining by way of employment or self-employment without delay. It is an integration policy that combines both whips and carrots.

But integration policies also need to respect the human rights of individuals to celebrate their different cultural traditions, values and religions as long as these do not conflict with the fundamental democratic values of society.

I would like to finish by touching upon three areas where we need to put more efforts to enhance integration.

First of all we need operational measures for a swift start up regarding more recent arrivals. Experience shows that early contact with the labour market is crucial for a successful integration. Hence, we need to develop better and more individually adapted introduction programmes that enable people to support themselves and participate in society in the shortest possible time.

Secondly, we need to raise awareness that social cohesion is a matter for all citizens. We need to mobilize social partners, private companies and other relevant actors to play more active roll in the integration process. There are significant gains to be made if governments, social partners, individual business join forces to combat social exclusion. All parties involved can benefit from such a joint effort

Thirdly we need effective anti-discrimination policies in which everyone enjoys equal and fair treatment in all aspects of social and economic life.

Governments alone, however, could hardly put an end to all types of discrimination. The means to achieve fair treatment in the labour market surpasses legal framework. As the old saying goes “men must change before kingdoms can”. In addition to legal instruments, there is a need for a change in attitudes among employers. A genuine conviction among employers concerning the advantages of diversity and increased awareness regarding the negative impacts of discrimination on a competitive labour market is more expedient than government intervention. Governments should also encourage Corporate Social Responsibility, benchmarking on diversity between public and private employers as well as recognize diversity as the descriptive and normative ground for sound economic development.

Thank you