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



**Keynote speech delivered by
Mr Peter Altmaier, Parliamentary State Secretary**

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the past few years, there has been a steady increase in people's mobility and flexibility all over the world. Global markets, groups of companies operating on a global scale, mobile communications, the Internet, satellite television as well as international air and tourist traffic have brought the world closer together. In today's world, contact with other countries and cultures, migration and integration are all part of everyday experience. Those of us who do not have any migration experience of their own, will probably know someone – in the family, within their circle of friends and acquaintances – who has emigrated or immigrated from one country to another or who perhaps even moves to and fro on a regular basis. Within Europe, international migration gained considerable momentum in the past twenty years, not least because of the radical political changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe since 1989. The European economic zone holds great appeal for migrants from all over the world. Particularly in the area of labour migration, we in Europe are competing with other countries in the world – first and foremost the U.S. and Canada – for skilled workers, for the “best brains” and talent. Frequently, migration movements have a veritable domino effect. As a result of the enlargement of the EU in 2005, large numbers of job seekers, for example from Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, migrated to the UK and Ireland, leaving gaps in the labour market which have, in turn, been filled by workers from Ukraine, Russia and other Eastern European countries. The labour market bottlenecks which have arisen there are, in turn, being filled by migrant workers from all over Asia.

According to United Nations estimates, a total of around 64 million migrants were living in Europe in 2005. That figure is equivalent to the total population of Spain, Portugal and Greece combined.

Almost all European countries need immigration because our populations are at risk of decline and because steadily increasing life expectancy is leading to a high rate of population ageing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Migrant workers for the most part make a major contribution to economic growth and, through their presence, enrich the culture of the host countries with new elements.

However, migration is frequently also associated with diffuse trepidation among the resident population. A representative study conducted by the Pew Institute in the U.S. in 2007 shows that the majority of the population surveyed in 44 out of 47 respondent countries around the world was in favour of imposing more severe restrictions on immigration. The reason for needing to impose restrictions cited by the vast majority of respondents was the need to protect their own way of life from foreign influences.¹

The fears of foreign influence associated with immigration exist almost everywhere. Moreover, I have noticed that these fears are particularly pronounced in countries and regions where immigration is a relatively new phenomenon or where the percentage of the total population accounted for by migrants is particularly low (e.g. eastern Germany). These fears are obviously abstract fears of the unknown and the unfamiliar. However, they must not lead to intolerance and wholesale rejection. The fact that prejudices and reservations against people with a migration background frequently exist and right-wing extremist groups are popular is a danger to all of our societies and is something I worry about a great deal. One thing needs to be clear to everyone: right-wing extremism, xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism are not compatible with the fundamental values of an open, peaceful and democratic society.

In order to counteract negative tendencies of this kind, we particularly need to support the integration of migrants. Migration and integration are two sides of one and the same coin. Successful integration lays the foundations for accepting tomorrow's immigration. Only if the population sees that immigration means enrichment and is also an opportunity for the economy, will it remain open to new migrants.

Integration is a task for society as a whole. Politicians are primarily responsible for ensuring that there is a favourable economic environment. The actual integration process takes place at schools, at work, in clubs, in daily life. Integration is a concrete task for people when they meet directly – both those who were born in the

¹ PewResearchCenter, World Publics Welcome Global Trade – But Not Immigration, 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Washington D.C., United States of America,

country and immigrants. This presents a challenge to all citizens and to all of the social players.

[Integration courses and language skills]

The introduction of nationwide integration courses for new immigrants in 2005 represents the single largest integration measure ever to be implemented in Germany. We earmark around EUR 155 million in the federal budget to finance these courses each year. The integration courses funded by the Federal Government are intended to enable participants to achieve a minimum standard of proficiency in the German language and to learn the basics of German history, culture and its political system. It is a huge success that we have managed to roll out this basic service on a nationwide basis.

With last year's amendments to the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz), we also created the general conditions that will ensure there will be no migration without integration in the future. One of the key issues in this context is that spouses who wish to join their families in Germany have to prove in their native country, in other words, before they leave for Germany, that they have a basic command of the German language. To this end, we have expanded the examination capabilities at the Goethe Institutes in the main countries of origin.

I think it is certainly legitimate and in accordance with human rights to expect immigrants to have a basic command of their host country's language. Finding a common means of communicating is in the interest of all stakeholders and fosters sustainable social cohesion. To this end, we have to place certain demands on new immigrants. This does not mean we are being patronising. Government promotion of integration is one thing, the willingness of immigrants to integrate fully into the host society is another. In my view, acquiring a basic command of the language in the country of origin underlines the serious intent of immigrants to integrate.

[German Islam Conference]

In addition to implementing concrete measures for the practical promotion of integration, we need to engage in a widespread social dialogue on how to promote the integration of immigrants. In doing so, we need to make sure that due

consideration is given to religious and cultural aspects of non-Western countries of origin.

Germany, for instance, is currently home to 3.5 million Muslims. The majority of them are of Turkish origin. Islam is increasingly becoming an integral part of our country. That is why we need to step up efforts to build bridges with each other. That is the whole purpose of the German Islam Conference which Minister Schäuble initiated in 2006. It is specifically a matter of developing an institutionalised relationship with Muslims living in Germany. For we need to do everything we can to foster developments in order to bring Islam, which has become an integral part of our society, into line with the basic values and basic decisions of our free democratic order – which is easier said than done.

We want to integrate Muslims into the tried and tested relationship between the state and religious communities that is based on the spirit of partnership and to convince them of our basic values. It is also a matter of strengthening reform-oriented, moderate Islamic forces.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I finish, I would like to express a few thoughts about cooperation with the countries of origin. In terms of development policy, it is important also to strengthen the countries of origin by adopting a responsible migration policy. We need to bear this in mind when managing migration movements and to chart new courses. The approach of circular migration, in particular, offers many opportunities. It is a contribution towards development aid that benefits all stakeholders if immigrants from poorer countries spend some time working in industrialised countries or undergo training there in order to return to their countries afterwards with more money and better know-how under their belts. We benefit not only from having temporary labour. It also enhances our security indirectly if these people promote democracy and the economy in their homeland after they return home. Countries of origin and destination and indeed migrants themselves benefit equally from circular migration. However, one prerequisite is that the immigrants do actually return to their homeland after a limited stay as this is the only way the transfer of information and know-how they have acquired can promote development. There are countries of origin that have ten, twenty or even more percent of their population living abroad. Ensuring migrants

return is therefore one of the key focal points of the pilot Mobility Partnership forged between the EU and 15 of its Member States and the Republic of Moldova.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a matter of engaging in an intensive dialogue, of dealing with each other with respect and of engaging in real cooperation. This applies to integration at national level – and to managing migration at international level. We need to meet each other half way in a free and pluralist Europe. We need common ideas and the highest possible level of voluntary harmonisation of statutory regulations in order to achieve peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. The Council of Europe plays a pivotal role in this process of bringing national rights and laws into line – particularly as far as the differences between EU countries and non-EU countries are concerned. I therefore have high hopes for all of us that this Conference will bring us a few steps closer together.