



8th COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR MIGRATION AFFAIRS

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



Mr Yavuz Mildon, President of the Congress of Local
and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Mr Chairman,

Ministers and their Representatives,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The process of European integration has brought the issues relating to migration and its management to the forefront of our political agenda. On the one hand, migration within Europe is becoming easier with the enlargement of the European Union, disappearance of political borders, and creation of common labour markets. On the other hand, Europe today is in need of migration from outside the continent, facing the aging population and the growing burden on the welfare state.

This Conference has rightly distinguished the three chapters of migration issues – development, management and social cohesion, as well as the need for an integrated approach, both within a country – which is, linking those three chapters together into a single “package” – as well as across Europe and beyond – an integrated approach between the countries of origin, transit and destination.

Migration and its management are of great importance to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Local and regional authorities are directly affected, in the most concrete way, by migration flows and, as such, can and must contribute to national and international policy-making on the subject. Territorial communities are the first to cope, in practical terms, with the influx of migrants, having to provide them and their families with shelter and food and then seeing to their employment and integration into local society. Any policy measures on migration should therefore necessarily take into account the local and regional experience.

As leaders and “managers” of their communities, local and regional authorities have a key role to play in facilitating the integration of migrants and their interaction with the rest of the local community. Their concrete experience in what actually works can be translated into concrete action at national and international level and serve as their contribution to developing an integrated approach and common policy within countries.

Our particular focus is the integration of migrants into communities at local and regional level; I would say “integration through participation and equal treatment”. It is in this spirit that the Congress, together with the City of Stuttgart and the Dublin-based European Foundation for Improving Living and Working Conditions, co-founded a European network of Cities for Local Integration Policy, CLIP, launched in 2006 and now involving over 30 municipalities. CLIP provides a forum for local authorities to exchange ideas and best practice, compare approaches in different countries and put forward optimized proposals to national governments, thus giving local communities a voice in national policy-making. We are certain that more cities will be joining in, especially from Central and Eastern Europe, given the importance of the East-West axis in migration flows.

It goes without saying that local and regional authorities apply national policies and legislation regarding migrants, and also come up with their own ideas, proposals and innovative approaches showing flexibility and pragmatism in dealing with migrants. We strongly believe that migrants should be regarded as an asset, and helping them as an investment which will yield benefits with the migrants' contribution to local economy. Whether a citizen or not, the migrant is de facto part of the fiber of the community, user of public services and as such an economic participant in its life.

This is why local and regional authorities, with the support of national governments, should implement measures conducive to the full involvement of migrants in the life of communities – measures including teaching the local language, promoting intercultural dialogue, providing professional training to equalise or upgrade the migrants' qualifications, especially for professions lacking on a particular market. Local and regional authorities, which are often the largest employer in the region, should also introduce measures facilitating migrants' employment – by, for example, reviewing their own restrictive recruitment requirements – and encouraging migrant entrepreneurship, giving them the possibility of starting their own small and medium-sized enterprises.

We believe that there should be more networks such as CLIP, involving local and regional authorities from the countries of origin, transit and destination. Another example of good practice could be networking between regions, involving communities of both countries of origin and of transit or countries of transit and of destination. In this regard, Congress Euroregions could serve as a model. A common approach within such networks could ensure that potential migrants receive the professional training and qualifications accepted in the country of transit or of destination. It could also help with the eventual re-integration of migrants in their country of origin.

A particularity of any country of transit regarding migrants is their limited duration of stay. This should not, however, change the fact that the authorities of transit countries have a duty to provide for the basic needs of migrants and, as far as possible, prepare them to be able to integrate more easily in the country of destination. One way of achieving this is through the harmonisation of laws and equalisation of professional requirements and qualifications between countries of transit and destination. Generally speaking, authorities in the countries of transit should see migration management as a long-term commitment, keeping in mind that infrastructures and services in place for migrants could be used for future migratory influxes.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that national governments should acknowledge the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities in migration management in line with the principle of subsidiarity, laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and therefore endow them with the requisite human and financial resources.

I hope that this Conference will give due consideration to this aspect.

Thank you.