



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

Kyiv, 4-5 September 2008

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



Mrs Corien Jonker, Vice-President of
the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Ministers,

Distinguished participants,

Dear colleagues,

It is a pleasure for me to address this important Conference on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe as its vice-President, in particular since the Assembly in recent years has given much more emphasis to migration, migrants and integration. This conference is therefore a welcome opportunity to share with you some of our concerns and ideas expressed in recommendations to member governments.

The Council of Europe family, as you know, is working to safeguard and realise the ideas and principles, which constitute our common heritage. Among our common values are the defence of Human Rights and the development of democracy.

Migrants are invited to share these values and take part in their defence and development, in their host countries as well as in their countries of origin.

In June this year the Parliamentary Assembly organised a major debate on Migrants, Migration and Democracy, and I would like to introduce some of the elements of this debate for your consideration.

Let me start by telling you that the Assembly agreed that the active participation of legally residing migrants in our democratic, social and economic institutions is of fundamental importance for our economies, for development, and for social cohesion. Our member countries must encourage, in different ways, its migrants to become active players in the democratic process, be it at the associative level, in enterprises or administrations, or at the political level, locally. This is in line with the Council of Europe Convention on Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level.

Most importantly, migrants themselves must engage in social and political life for their own wellbeing as members of their host society.

Regarding political participation, we can notice that the European Union is a special case because citizens of another member state can take part in local and European elections. However, I think that voting and standing as candidates in local and regional elections for non-citizen resident migrants could also be an achievable goal among Council of Europe member countries. Many countries have already introduced such possibilities after a fixed time of residence, which varies among countries, and may depend on reciprocity.

For the purpose of political participation as well as social and economic integration, it is necessary for migrants to learn the values and language(s) of the host country. All migrant families **must make sure that all their members** will acquire the local language.

The Assembly is also in favour of facilitating access to citizenship and to allow dual citizenship in order to encourage participation and integration. When we talk about migration among Council of Europe member states, this makes all the more sense since we are experiencing an increased circular migration or worker mobility. This mobility also includes retired persons. A guiding document is the Council of Europe Convention on Nationality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our Assembly is deeply concerned by the ever-growing number of irregular migrants in Europe. We consider that it is the right of each Council of Europe member state to regulate the entry of foreign nationals and to return irregular migrants to their country of origin in accordance with international human rights law. The fight against trafficking must be stepped up.

In October this year our Assembly will debate a report on Europe's "boat-people". Last year more than 51.000 persons arrived in Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain, and since 1993 close to 10 000 persons perished. Europe has a responsibility to avoid that people die trying to enter its territory, but also to share responsibility for those qualifying for asylum.

In a recent report to the Assembly, I have analysed the possible use of transit and processing centres as a response to mixed flows of migrants and asylum seekers. My and the Assembly's concern focused on the human rights perspectives of such centres if established within the European Union, in a member states of the Council of Europe, or outside Europe.

Generally speaking, we believe that there will always be a number of irregular migrants in Europe, including with children. These people must enjoy some fundamental rights, and we are asking member governments to respect this principle.

The migration –links between Europe and its natural partners, Africa, in particular Mediterranean countries, Asia and the Americas have evidently found a place in our work. We believe that information sharing on legal migration opportunities and on the dangers of irregular migration could be given more emphasis in our co-operation with these continents, as could co-development policies..

Dear participants,

The Assembly has on three occasions with different partners organised a **European Day on Migration and Integration**. It is my hope that such events could be organised on a regular basis and that your Conference will give its support to such an all-European Day of reflection and discussion.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a successful conference, that I hope will give new impulses to the Council of Europe's work in this area.