



# 8<sup>th</sup> 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**



Ms Astrid Thors, Minister of Migration and  
European Affairs, Finland

**Prime Minister Tymoshenko,  
Secretary General Davis,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a special pleasure for me to have this opportunity to address this distinguished audience.

### **Introduction**

International migration has changed substantially in recent years. Immigration pressures are clearly visible in most of our countries: some CoE countries have experienced unprecedented waves of legal immigration; others have tightened their entry policies. These tendencies are also visible in the implementation of the Helsinki Plan of Action.

In a number of countries, the nature of economic immigration itself has changed markedly in terms of motivation, expected duration of stay or legality.

Migration flows are likely to continue at a sustained pace in the coming decades. This is due to widening standard of living and demographic imbalances between developing and developed countries, diminishing information and transportation costs, in the context of persistent income disparities across regions.

As one of the main channels of interdependency among economies, immigration is a longstanding concern for policy makers, and has been alternately considered as a challenge or an opportunity for the local economy - be it in the country of origin or destination - with multi-faceted consequences. New challenges have emerged:

*Firstly*, the labour market integration of immigrants is at the same time a huge possibility - not to be missed - and a risky challenge - to be taken seriously AND fully aware of the increased tension that its failure would produce among local population in numerous CoE countries. The question of integration does not only concern immigrants, but also their family members.

*Secondly*, the increasing share of immigrants - representing also wide cultural diversity - in the labour force, especially of unskilled individuals, raises concerns about the consequences for labour market outcomes.

### ***How to manage economic migration and its many challenges***

Economic migration is at the core of the present debates in Member States of the CoE. Some see migration as one of the ways to address labour market needs and to try and compensate for the forecasts on the ageing of the European population. Others are in favour of reducing the present migration flows or at least of limiting them through a skills-based approach.

It is evident that CoE countries will need more migration. Labour and skills shortages are already noticeable in a number of national sectors and - according to numerous researches - they will tend to increase.

Obviously immigration is only one of the solutions to compensate for demographic ageing and to sustain the growing costs of the welfare systems.

However, we must at the same time aim at efficient and effective management of legal migration flows and, at the same time, fight illegal migration in all its dimensions, in particular as concerns the trafficking of human beings and organised crime. We also need to intensify our efforts aimed at minimizing negative effects of informal economy, which acts as a “pull factor” for illegal immigration and, in general terms, leads to exploitation of migrants.

Receiving countries that demonstrate a balanced management of migration movements that is at the same time welcoming but firm, and in accordance both with international standards and with national needs, will be in a more favourable position to profit from the benefits of international migration.

Therefore, special emphasis in the countries of origin and destination should be put on the situation of migrants: human rights, especially rights of women and children, right to family life, working conditions, informal economy etc. In this respect several specific areas of concern can be identified. These are:

- social and labour rights of migrant workers and their family members,
- working conditions of migrant workers (with special attention to the informal sector),
- fight against discrimination including adoption and implementation of policies of integration, including questions related to non-discrimination in the labour market,
- caring for the special needs and minimizing the vulnerability of certain social groups, in particular women and children
- strengthening of the normative framework and
- increasing dialogue on migration with all parties, including migrants, and on all sectors of the society.

Third-country nationals should enjoy the same working conditions and rights as our nationals. This will protect both the third-country migrants and our workers from discrimination and exploitation. The overall aim should be to achieve a basic set of rights, common to all CoE countries: this will encourage migrants to go where their work and skills are needed rather than where the social security is more advantageous.

### ***Equal treatment***

One of the fundamental requirements for a functioning economy is equal treatment and here the CoE has had a ground-breaking role when speaking of achieving common agreement on general prohibition of discrimination. But we shall not confine ourselves to this. Every international agreement - in order to have the anticipated and intended results - also needs to be implemented nationally. Credible policy requires credible actions!

### ***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Eight years is a long time. We must show that our political commitments are not mere wordmongering. Protocol 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and

Fundamentals Freedoms still lacks too many signatures. We must face reality and the reality is that this protocol is an integral prerequisite for any successful management of economic migration.

***Policy coherence - first requirement of managed migration***

Managed migration necessitates a comprehensive approach to migration. It is important to place emphasis on the implementation of this political framework in practical terms, i.e. incorporating actions on the short, medium and long-term.

What does this mean for the CoE and its members?

I would like to stress the need to improve internal practices both within the CoE as well as at the level of member states' national policy strategies in order to better enhance policy coherence. Implementation of the commitments made by CoE countries requires the cooperation with third countries to be further specified with the perspective of mutual benefit for both the CoE countries and third countries.

The global role of the different international actors, including CoE, is important. Where joint positions are prepared, it is important to uphold them with the aim of influencing global processes.

Also this requires new and innovative forms of co-operation between CoE and countries of origin in the field of economic migration. The global nature of migration highlights the importance of managing migration through international co-operative efforts i.e. between the countries of the CoE. There he CoE has a role to play. Through intensive and constructive dialogue - based on reliable and balanced information - it could address several main areas of co-operation, e.g. raising national standards of rights and benefits allotted to migrant workers and their family members, and focusing on gender aspects on labour migration.

Within the CoE itself the ways in which economic - and also in general - migration issues are covered should also be examined with a view to perhaps strengthening current internal coordination. Strengthening the coordinating role of. the CDMG could be one option to further enhancing cooperation and coherence between the different sectors of the CoE and its member states. Enhanced practical communication and collaboration across the policy areas also between formal meetings is furthermore needed.

What is of paramount importance is that the CoE itself supports - and here I would very much highlight - with all its available means the present and future work of the CDMG. In a time when issues of migration are becoming vital to the development of our economies it would be counter-productive - and controversial to the recent policy statements of the CoE - to reduce financial allocation in the CoE activities on migration. On the contrary, I would very much like to see both the role and financial means of the CDMG be given more priority. Otherwise the discussions here today and tomorrow are certainly intellectually very fruitful but in terms of political credibility prove totally the opposite.

Also other issues should be dealt coherently. In Europe immigration policies have not always benefited migrant workers and there is still significant ethnic tension. Human trafficking and the solicitation of illegal youth workers have gone underground in a number of countries and nearby regions. Therefore more cooperation of members of the CoE is needed to prevent human rights violations, trafficking and other illegal practices.

I would like to emphasize the importance of taking also development aspects into account in a cross-cutting way in all our policy issues. Questions regarding brain-drain are naturally of particular importance in the policy agenda on economic migration.

Enhancing cooperation with third countries and the implementation of the conclusions made by the CoE guarantee that the linkages between economic migration and development are taken properly into account.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The European Union and its Member States have embarked on an ambitious process of developing a common immigration policy. This project has been enhanced along the way to cover more and more elements, even to the extent that the concept of common immigration policy may seem - at least if narrowly defined - somewhat inadequate to describe what is actually going on in this field.

Immigration - be it economic, temporary, circular, permanent - is only a certain dimension of a more complex set of issues relating to the global movement of people, and it is this complex set of issues the European Union is currently trying to tackle in a comprehensive manner. This includes

not only harmonising the Member States' legislation and immigration policies, but also striving for joint approaches in their external policies in the field of migration.

There is a need to achieve better coherence in the external actions and that the link between migration and development should be strengthened. Therefore, I would say that a conceptual change is taking place. Instead of understanding migration issues as only being related to the question of regulating entry or residence, we - at least in the European Union - have started to examine migration from a holistic point of view and explore its various dimensions and their inter-relatedness more thoroughly.

### **Economic migration and the country of origin**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that about half of the world's migrants are workers. Migrant workers not only contribute to the economies of their host countries, and the remittances they send home augment their home economies. Migrant workers are also contributing to growing diasporas, dispersed communities abroad who have ties to both origin and host countries but without full membership in either.

Despite encouraging overall economic figures the maltreatment of many migrant workers is still very common. As I mentioned earlier, migrant workers are vulnerable to harassment, exploitation and human trafficking.

However, skilled migrant workers are generally less vulnerable to exploitation, but - and here I really have to emphasize the following fact - their departure has deprived some developing countries of valuable labour needed for their own economies. As you very well know many of these well-educated and skilled workers are youth, who make up - according to some estimates - approximately 30% of the world's migrants.

### **Common and coherent actions - why?**

Why do we need common and coherent actions on all aspects of migration? Would it not be sufficient that each country managed the movement of people into its territory by itself? The answer is evident. The new challenges posed by globalisation, demographic changes, advancements in

communication technologies and transportation have led to a situation where it is no longer possible to handle migration issues only on a national level even though national labour market needs may play a pivotal role. Common and coherent actions are necessary in order to respond to the issues posed by economic and factual globalisation, taking also into account the level of integration in other sectors.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

### **Public opinion on economic migration**

We - from the point of view of the EU - have responded to the globalisation with a variety of policies: tighter border controls, crackdowns on human trafficking, clearer asylum rules, continued emphasis on integration policies and cooperation with third countries to help control migrant flows.

What have we achieved with these measures? Yes, more control. But at the same time migration policies and public opinion influence each other in both positive and negative ways. Research on public opinion towards migrants shows large differences in CoE states, between income groups and social classes, and between the types of fear and apprehension that migration arouses. Global economic competition is growing and results in fears of job losses. Against this background of felt insecurity, the general view of immigrants and migratory phenomena by the media and by politicians is often biased or negative, linking them often almost exclusively to security issues. Though the overall public opinion on migration has been somewhat negative throughout Europe we have seen positive development in people's attitudes. But further needs to be done.

### **The cause for economic migration**

Often the general assumption is that migration is by and large a supply driven phenomenon. The reality is much more nuanced. The demand for labour that migrants can meet is often the reason to migrate and of their choice of destination. As long as there are jobs for migrants, they will try to move, one way or the other. Many migrants may be poor and low skilled relative to the host society, but they are mostly not in relation to their country of origin since sellable skills and substantial amounts of money are needed to emigrate.

As I mentioned earlier, labour markets will need migrants in the coming decades. Europe needs to be an attractive place to work - and not only - for the highly skilled. To a certain extent migrants of a large variety of skills are needed to partially offset demographic trends and to be employed in areas where there is insufficient supply of labour. While migration alone is not sufficient to meet the future demand for labour, increasing labour participation by the native population does not suffice either. This is clear also in the case of Finland.

### **Effects of migration**

Migration is potentially beneficial for receiving countries and societies, for countries of origin and for the migrants themselves. Immigrants can make valuable contributions by relieving labour shortages, increasing labour market efficiency, and acting as catalysts for job creation, innovation and growth. Immigrants can enhance cultural diversity and stimulate interest in other cultures and regions of the world among native populations. In addition, they can make important contributions to economic development in their countries of origin by means of remittances.

However, the speed with which migration takes place requires careful management. In absence of such careful management, migration can accentuate existing problems on social housing, schools, labour markets and feelings of insecurity. Some of these problems are already visible in our countries, but none of these problems - I dare to say - is linked to migration per se. However, failing to act today could imply these problems will expand with serious consequences for European societies.

### **Challenges ahead**

Market integration is especially important as it encompasses important aspects of integration (e.g. language, culture). Integration is a two-way responsibility and migrants need to make serious efforts to integrate, while receiving countries need to continue to promote integration. This means e.g. labour market reforms that yield equal opportunities to all, while public opinion on migrants as job thieves or welfare scroungers need to be opposed.

Illegal migration is dangerous for the people involved, creates incentives for illegal activities and impacts negatively upon public opinion, damaging public opinion on legal migrants in almost equal measure. Actions that are needed require that Europe uses opportunities for legal migration beyond

the strict conditions attached to family reunion. This provides a legitimate route of entry for some asylum seekers or irregular migrants, who would prefer to enter as legal or regular migrants. For such an expansion of migration opportunities to be beneficial and politically feasible, careful integration of new and existing migrants is necessary - as well as illegal employment needs to be reduced.

Gender issues need to receive more attention as women make a lion's share of international migration and also play a pivotal role in successful integration. The role and vulnerabilities of first and second generation female migrants often remains overlooked. Improving their status by empowering them with equal opportunities and rights should help integration in our societies. It may bring cultural differences to be debated with the full participation of everybody concerned. This would have a positive effect both on public opinion and to unbolt potential areas of conflicts linked to gender relations.

### ***Putting economic migration in a broader context***

For economic migration to be managed effectively the issue needs to be put in a broader context. International mobility is seen both as a cause and effect of these threats, even though mobility is a natural and indeed desirable phenomenon. The inability to resolve structural problems in our economies and Europe's earlier high unemployment - which trend is by the way threatening to resurface again - is another factor contributing to negative opinions on immigration. Poor functioning of the labour market inhibits integration and leads to social exclusion, impacting on both members of the host country as well as immigrants, whether for Europe's existing inhabitants or for migrants present and future, and there,

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We - as members of the CoE - have a task to make Europe a more attractive place to live.

*Thank you*

*I am looking forward to a very lively and stimulating discussion and a conference.*