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Regional Conference on "Migration of unaccompanied minors: acting in the best interests of the child"

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**CO-OPERATION REQUIRED BETWEEN COUNTRIES OF
DESTINATION AND COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN TO IMPROVE
MIGRATION MANAGEMENT**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I. Background

Migration has increasingly become even more of a key political issue than they used to be, not only in Europe but throughout the world.

Over the last two decades, despite the consistently high levels of unemployment occurring in European societies, there has been a huge expansion of the informal economy owing to the decline of traditional industrial sectors, developments related to technological progress, increased competition and the globalisation of trade. This has increased the demand for migrant workers who are unorganised, tractable and undemanding when it comes to salaries and working conditions. At the same time, in countries of origin, the prospects for economic development have dwindled, also as a result of this increased competition of products on international markets.

Observance of human rights – including the right to a better future – is the central theme of our presentation, and must be the cornerstone of any initiative, whether it is of an economic or social nature.

Compliance with the rules laid down by a democratic society is, naturally, a vital prerequisite for maintaining social cohesion and promoting social development. However, the problems that arise on a daily basis must always be dealt with in this spirit of upholding human rights, but also in an effort to build the necessary solidarity to ensure that there is less injustice and poverty in the world.

All human beings, all over the world, have the right to a better future for themselves, their children and their children's children, particularly when they have experienced poverty, exclusion or lack of respect.

In September 2005, participants in the first Euro-Asian Parliamentary Forum on Migration , held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, called for all nations to make greater efforts to achieve fairer sustainable economic development, in order to reduce the gap between developed and developing countries and regions – one of the main reasons why individuals or groups of individuals abandon their birthplaces.

The philosophy behind the CDMG's work is based on: fleshing out debate, drawing up proposals or recommendations to encourage member states to develop appropriate policies to achieve more justice, equal opportunities and solidarity, while promoting diversity as an asset, higher levels of participation and the greater well-being of all people.

Analysis, proposals relating to integration, and migration flow management must be set against this background.

Co-operation and partnerships between host countries, countries of origin and countries of transit are essential factors of success in achieving better integration of migrants in host societies, and in more balanced management of migration and its economic and social effects.

For the Council of Europe,

"**Social cohesion** comprises all the elements and processes that help to strengthen society's ability to secure the long-term well-being of all its members, including **equitable access** to available resources, **respect for human dignity** and diversity, personal and collective **autonomy** and responsible participation".

The "integration of immigrants and minorities" must be understood within the meaning of this definition of social cohesion. There can be no successful integration without social cohesion and there can be no successful social cohesion without proper integration of immigrants and minorities.

II Some of the CDMG's recent major activities

In addition to the series of recommendations drawn up by the CDMG since its creation in 1979, I would like to highlight two of its particularly important initiatives in recent years:

- improved knowledge, improved monitoring and assessment of policies implemented;
- establishment of dialogue between countries of emigration, countries of transit and countries of immigration.

II.1. In 2003, the CDMG drew up a list of integration indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, to be recorded for each country, with the aim of improving the monitoring and assessment of policies implemented in this area.

This tool concerns eight important spheres of life: employment, housing, health, nutrition, education, information and culture, and analyses the basics of the relevant public functions, viz. the founding, remedial and enabling functions.

This tool is intended as a guide, or benchmark, to be used by anyone wishing to develop an integration policy for migrants in one of the sectors analysed. It enables short, medium and long-term objectives to be set.

It can be broken down according to specific population groups such as unaccompanied minors outside their country of origin.

II.2. At the end of 2003, the CDMG set up the first Political Platform of the Council of Europe on Migration, concerned with North-South and East-West dialogue, and has continued to hold these half-yearly meetings since then.

The aim of the political platform is to promote North-South and East-West dialogue and co-operation in the area of migration between countries of origin, transit and destination.

2.1. Two themes were chosen for the **first meeting of the political platform**, held in Amsterdam in December 2003:

- the first was the **role of information**:

- how to ensure dissemination in countries of transit and countries of origin of accurate information on migration conditions in Europe (channels of legal migration, family reunification, recognition of qualifications, visa systems, fairness of selection processes);
- how to disseminate intelligently, in host societies, information about countries of origin, and in particular about the migration pressures resulting from the level of development in these countries;
- how to increase knowledge and understanding of migrants' cultures in host societies.

- the second theme was **integration as a factor for development** the question discussed was:

- how to ensure that the process of integration in host societies is of equal benefit to countries of origin and countries of destination in economic, social, cultural and educational terms.

2.2. The second meeting of the political platform, which was held in Strasbourg, in May 2004, was on the theme of **student mobility**.

The European Committee on Migration decided to examine the situation of migrant students in EU member states, with the aim of promoting student mobility and the transfer of qualifications and know-how between countries of destination and origin.

The problems raised by student mobility are bound up with the specific nature of this mobility.

In this connection, the issue of return to the country of origin is of particular importance.

Discussion centred on three areas in which problems arise at the different stages of study of overseas students:

- **Departure** (how to frame consistent and transparent visa policies, how to provide students with reliable information, etc.).
- **Study period** (how to ensure that students make the most of their studies; how to ensure that foreign students are not unfairly treated or exploited);
- **Return** (how to deal with "brain-drain" problems; how to ensure that students return once they have completed their studies).

2.3. The third meeting of the political platform, held in November 2004 in Strasbourg, addressed the issue of **unaccompanied minors outside their country of origin**.

The questions providing the backdrop to the meeting were:

- How to ensure that these minors are not traumatised for life;
- How to ensure that they do not fall prey to human trafficking networks;
- How to prevent them or their families, at the outset, from being lured into this type of migration;
- What training, education, monitoring, supervision and life plan should be arranged for, and with, these young people.

During the discussions, participants stressed the need for co-operation between the countries of origin, transit and destination in order to deal effectively with the complex problems of unaccompanied minors, highlighting the following key points:

- There is a clear need to adopt a global, balanced approach that is sufficiently flexible to cater for the requirements of each individual without forfeiting the integrity of national immigration control systems;
- The root causes of migration of unaccompanied minors need to be addressed. This means, in particular, developing national policies aimed at strengthening families and educating parents, but above all setting up sustainable co-development programmes. European migration policies must also be reassessed;
- It seems clear that different countries, including states that are not members of the Council of Europe, implement specific measures aimed at migrants who are unaccompanied minors (for example reception centres). Unfortunately, exchange of national experiences at international level is rare. It would be useful to have a framework allowing the regular exchange of useful information and good (or bad) practices;
- The reintegration of children returning to their societies of origin is an important factor that could potentially reduce the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe. If such reintegration were successful, children returning to their countries would be able to provide their peers with accurate and reliable information on what to expect from illegal migration. National experiences of reintegration should be exchanged and new projects launched with the help of European countries.

Various "life plans" devised for children should be put in place so that they can build their life in the host country or rejoin society in their country of origin. Such plans should be designed as part of an overall approach incorporating the different aspects of co-operation between the countries of origin, transit and destination; the education of parents and children; the participation of international agencies such as the Red Cross, etc. To ensure successful implementation of these projects, European countries must accept that not all migrant children will return to their country of origin.

2.4. The 4th meeting of the Political Platform of the Council of Europe on Migration addressed the theme of co-development between North and South and the way in which countries of origin maintain links with nationals who have migrated

Three workshops were held prior to the meeting, in April 2004, December 2004 and March 2005 by the CDMG in conjunction with the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe based in Lisbon.

The aim of these workshops was to further North-South dialogues by providing an opportunity to address issues of practical co-operation; exchange examples of good practice, particularly in the area of micro-projects; come up with project proposals and, if possible, facilitate the necessary fund-raising.

The following recommendations were made during these workshops:

- implement a policy of co-operation that is consistent with migration policy;
- promote an environment that is favourable to co-development initiatives, and place migrants at the centre of these initiatives;

- encourage inter-regional dialogue;
- facilitate access by migrants to credit;
- recognise individuals and associations as co-partners in development and assist in placing migrant associations on a professional footing;
- promote and support the contribution of highly qualified migrants in countries of destination and origin, and their development-related initiatives.

Migrants are not a burden, but an important asset which should serve to bring countries of origin and destination closer together.

These discussions are being continued by a CDMG committee of experts and by meetings held in conjunction with the North-South Centre.

2.5. The fifth meeting of the political platform, held last week in Athens, dealt with the **image of migration in the media**, the representation of immigrants in the media and the information which should be available in countries of departure, so that migrants are not completely uninformed on arrival and, in countries of destination, to improve their reception.

The following issues were also addressed: the role of governments, migrants' associations and NGOs in promoting an appropriate image of migrants in the host society and the society of countries of transit.

The CDMG also agreed that it should provide national and local authorities with more legal, political and practical guidelines for implementing policies on integration and inter-community relations. This work should feature greater dialogue with the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and NGOs.

Here I have run through the main areas of work, ideas and proposals of the European Committee on Migration of the Council of Europe aimed at promoting migration management more in keeping with migrants' the aspirations for a better future.