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INTEGRATION THROUGH EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY EUROPE

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

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Sehr geehrte Frau Bundeskanzlerin,

Frau Staatsministerin Böhmer,

Herr Jousen, Herr Krull,

Bill Gates gönnen wir nun seine verdiente Nachtruhe. Wir aber machen weiter.

Meine sehr verehrten Damen und Herren,

es ist mir eine grosse Freude und Ehre, heute hier in Berlin zu Ihnen sprechen zu dürfen. Sie alle wissen, dies ist eine sehr wichtige Woche für die Europäische Union. Am Donnerstag und Freitag wollen wir endgültig beim Europäischen Rat in Portugal den neuen EU-Reformvertrag verabschieden. Die deutsche Präsidentschaft unter Führung von Angela Merkel hat hierfür beim Juni-Gipfel

den Durchbruch erzielt und damit die Basis gelegt. Nun will die portugiesische Präsidentschaft diese Arbeit zum Abschluss bringen. Ich als Präsident der Europäischen Kommission werde ich sie dabei nach allen Kräften unterstützen.

Denn wir brauchen den neuen Reformvertrag dringend, um besser und effizienter Politik im Interesse unserer Bürgerinnen und Bürger machen zu können. Dazu zählt auch, und in Zukunft immer mehr, die Integration von Einwanderern, und wie wir diese Integration, in unserem eigenen Interesse, gesamt-europäisch gestalten können.

Integrating immigrants into our societies is of key importance at a time when the European Union is equipping itself to face up to the challenges of the 21st century.

We find ourselves having to come to grips with the new realities of globalisation, the knowledge economy, security, energy and climate change but also, as we are all aware, with the new realities of demography and migration.

Europe is tackling these challenges. By stressing the importance of the education, research and innovation triangle in the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, which is our priority. By exploring avenues for working together to pre-empt the challenges posed by an ageing population in Europe and to develop a well-managed migration policy. And

by taking stock of the social realities in Europe, an exercise on which we recently embarked.

The course ahead is clearly mapped out. The main political milestones are in place to guide us to our goal of creating a strong, modern and dynamic Europe in the world.

However, we will not succeed in this without social cohesion. We will not succeed in this without investing in our human potential. And we will not succeed in this without rapidly mobilising our human resources and, in so doing, integrating immigrants into our society.

There is no miracle remedy for bringing about the harmonious integration of immigrants.

What we do know for sure is that **integration is an imperative. It is a collective**

endeavour ultimately based on education, which opens the door to employment and active participation in social and cultural life. We should remember that this is an issue of major importance that concerns 18.5 million residents of the European Union.

Integration is not a luxury. It is actually a political, economic, social and ethical imperative.

It is a political imperative because, if integration proves problematic, this will trigger a negative response that extremists will exploit to undermine our democracies, sometimes in a violent manner, as you well know.

Integration is an economic imperative because, if immigrants are not sufficiently integrated into, say, the labour market, this will not promote growth - quite the contrary, in fact.

Lastly, it is a social and ethical imperative since Europe cannot, at the same time, be in need of immigrants to meet the requirements of its economy and not offer them in return every opportunity to become fully integrated into their host society.

Conversely, new arrivals here in Europe cannot, at the same time, seek out a better life and not seize the opportunities offered to them to integrate into their new environment.

Integration is a two-way process. The citizens of the Union must adapt to the diversity of

those they welcome into their midst. And, I would add, "as they have always done". The philosopher Jürgen Habermas summed this up very well recently when he said: "The children of former immigrants, and their children's children, have long been part of our society." For their part, immigrants must adapt to the civic values of Europe and of their host country. This two-way process calls for a wide-ranging collective approach to integration.

Integration is a collective endeavour in which we are all partners together – Europe, the Member States, local politicians, NGOs, civil society, foundations, churches, public services and, of course, European citizens and immigrants themselves. I would also add companies, which should participate in

integration efforts because they are stakeholders, too. And let us not forget the media either, which influences the way migration is presented.

Everyone has an important role to play in offering guidance, in making decisions, in taking action and in enhancing awareness.

And what is the role of the European Commission in all this?

Firstly, it has established the framework conditions through instruments for promoting fundamental rights, non-discrimination and equality of opportunity. This is one of the undeniable contributions that Europe has made.

Europe has also adopted legislative instruments on the conditions for admission and residence of third-country nationals that are obviously having an impact on the success of integration. Take, for example, family reunification and long-term residence.

That said, the Commission's role is one of a facilitator in the service of the Member States of the Union.

In 2005 it set about tackling integration as part of a comprehensive approach to migration. We are making rapid progress on this front.

The Commission has also looked at what could be done at European level. This is why we have a common framework and agenda for integration for the period from 2007 to 2010. We also have common basic principles

for the policy on integrating immigrants in the EU. The Commission will be setting up a new fund to promote integration, that will have a budget of 825 million euros for the period 2007-2013. This fund will provide resources for projects involving immigrant children and young people.

Above all, the Commission has put in place a very effective instrument for encouraging Member States to exchange their experiences and tried-and-tested measures. We must concentrate on what works. Good examples of this include: pre-school education; language support, also for families; desegregation measures; improving the attractiveness of disadvantaged schools; and extra-curricular activities.

So, as you can see, the Commission is very actively engaged in several important initiatives that will continue in the years ahead. It is making the best European practices available to all. While each country in the Union has its own history and its own perception of how its immigrants should be integrated, all the Member States are clear that cohesion is the key and must succeed.

So, what are the **key elements in the integration process** on which we need to focus our joint efforts?

Education is, without doubt, of central importance.

Education is where all the aspects of integration come together.

By offering education and training to immigrants, we are providing them with opportunities, with the best toolkit for social integration and with the best guarantee possible against exclusion, unemployment and discrimination. We are also providing ourselves with the best possible guarantee of a society that is, of course, fairer but also more creative and more dynamic, one that is fully in line with our Lisbon Strategy. We are investing in the children of immigrants.

First and foremost, we must reduce the number of young people leaving school or higher education early, a large proportion of whom are children of immigrants. This has to be our top priority, involving as it does some six million people in Europe aged between 18 and 24.

Migrant children have much poorer results than their classmates, and this disadvantage persists in the second generation and beyond. A look at the unemployment figures for second-generation immigrants is disconcerting – while their parents came to work, their children very often find themselves unemployed. Can we accept this?

Everyone agrees that a special effort at integration in schools must be made for immigrant children and young people. This is a question of equity. It is also a question of effectiveness. The earlier in the education process that this investment is made, the more productive it will be.

When at school, children must also be able to acquire the skills and qualifications needed in the globalised knowledge economy. In the

open world that awaits all Europe's children in the 21st century, language learning must be viewed as an indispensable long-term investment, from the first class in primary school to the first steps in working life. And I am not talking only about the language of the host country! In the EU we have even said that the objective should be to learn two foreign languages.

At the same time, migration poses a significant challenge for education systems, which have to cope with diversity. Education policies need therefore to take adequate account of the needs of migrants in order not to impair the overall equity and effectiveness of education systems. We know that inequities in education and training may have huge

hidden costs which rarely show up in public accounting systems.

We still have a long way to go in reforming the systems of life-long education and training if we are to reap the benefits of immigration.

However, the public authorities cannot succeed in this alone without opening up schools to companies, foundations and civil society. Public/private partnerships can bring a very significant added value. Companies benefit from the work of migrants and, as part of corporate social responsibility actions, it is highly beneficial if they support integration activities in education. "Second-chance schools" play this role. Some excellent examples of actions funded by private sponsors include grant schemes, tutorship

programmes and support for extra-curricular activities.

Qualifications, language knowledge and cultural skills are the surest ways of facilitating access by immigrants or the children of immigrants to another **key element of integration, employment.**

Our labour markets need the additional labour provided by immigrants. And we are all aware that our needs are growing all the time, particularly for the most highly qualified workers.

The United States attracts 55% and the EU 5% of skilled immigrants. Conditions in Europe need, therefore, to be improved if we are to attract such labour. The criterion to be

applied must be the specific requirements of each country's labour market.

The Commission will adopt next week a new proposal aiming exactly at establishing EU admission conditions for high skilled workers. It will also simplify the procedures in order to facilitate the admission of this category of migrants and to promote their efficient integration on the EU labour market.

If migrant workers are successfully integrated into the labour market, this will help to promote growth and hence employment. We can now see quite clearly that in some Member States the integration of large numbers of immigrants and of women into the working environment has boosted job creation.

Furthermore immigrants must be encouraged to set up in business and, to my mind, it is also essential to promote the employment of female immigrants. These are opportunities for integration that must be exploited, not to mention gender equality and equality of opportunity for all!

The integration of immigrants through education also leads, of course, to active participation in the life of the host society. I would like here to praise the role played by all those who promote integration on the ground – local politicians, teachers, associations – the public faces of the host country. This is because they bear an enormous responsibility, providing as they do access to housing, health, education, sport and culture. And we know full well that it is these daily

contacts and local activities that bind society together.

But there is perhaps also another responsibility which we must all share, including the media, and of which little is said: we must highlight all the positive contributions that immigrants make to our societies. As we have said, they contribute to demographic and economic dynamism in Europe. We must not though forget the contribution made by immigrants to European culture in the broad sense, to our languages, to the arts, to leisure activities, to science and even to our culinary scene! This is an immense source of vitality for societies in Europe.

The growing diversity in our society is an opportunity for enrichment. Intercultural dialogue plays an important role in creating

value out of diversity. The 2008 European Year on Intercultural Dialogue will provide a useful framework for this.

Lastly, I would like to draw your attention to a dimension that is of fundamental importance. This dialogue that we have mentioned is the best way of promoting understanding and acceptance of others. It also affords the best protection against racism, discrimination and intolerance.

Let me make it very clear to you today that the European Union, which is a paradigm of openness and diversity, cannot and will not remain blind to outbursts of xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and religious fanaticism which we unfortunately witness from time to time. We must all make a stand against such outbursts, because they are

incompatible with the very idea underlying the European project and with our values.

Do we need to be reminded that the principle of mutual acceptance is what binds Europe together as a whole?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe has the political and cultural resources it needs to allow immigrants to be successfully integrated into society. So, let us make the most of them here and now. We hold the future in our hands.

Thank you.