

Intervention by Commissioner Cecilia Malmström at the third meeting of the European Integration Forum, Brussels 24 June 2010-06-24



Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to take part in this third meeting of the European Integration Forum, the first one under my mandate as Commissioner for Home Affairs. I take the opportunity **to thank President Sepi** for the work of the European Economic and Social Committee and especially for its cooperation in organising the Forum.

Last week, the European Council adopted the **EU 2020 Strategy** for jobs and growth, which outlines how the EU can become more competitive in the future. It states that the employment rate should reach 75 percent and this has to be encouraged, among other things, through **a better integration of legal migrants**.

In **a time of economic crisis**, migrants are among the most vulnerable groups. Around two million third-country nationals are currently unemployed in the EU. The risks of exploitation and exclusion are much higher for them, particularly for women, newly arrived and less educated migrants. Efforts on integration will therefore remain crucial as **immigration will keep shaping our societies** in the long term. Europe faces demographic challenges that make immigration necessary for the permanence of our social model.

Successful integration is crucial to make **immigration a source of cultural and economic wealth**. Successful integration means equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all residents. This was the message that the European Council sent more than ten years ago in Tampere, when Member States agreed that the legal status and rights of

third-country nationals holding a long-term residence permit should be approximated to those of Member States' nationals.

Regular migrants need to see their rights recognised. This comprises the right to work as an employee or self-employed, the right of access to education and healthcare and the opportunity to obtain the nationality of the Member State in which they are resident.

The Commission encourages **participation of migrants** in the political and social life of their host countries, as this is crucial for a successful integration. Although access to citizenship is regulated at national level, the EU can provide an added value in analysing and promoting best practices on civic and political participation.

Interaction between migrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental means for integration. **Forums of intercultural dialogue** at local, regional and national level are an effective way of participation and help to develop shared understanding and trust.

This is why the Commission encourages public authorities to develop forums **helping migrants' voices to reach the political level.** The Annual Work Programme for the European Integration Fund has this year for the first time a specific priority focussing on the role of civil society organisations and the local authorities in designing integration strategies.

Participation of migrants, strong commitment by the host community and introductory courses will be covered by the **European modules for integration**, to be developed by the Commission in the coming months. The European Integration Forum could also discuss ways to promote participation of migrants in a future meeting.

Two months ago, I participated in a ministerial conference on Integration in Zaragoza, where two civil society representatives, **elected by you, participated for the first time.**

During this Conference, Member States underlined the importance of networks and dialogue involving civil society. In the Conference Declaration, the role of the **European Integration Forum** was clearly acknowledged, which proves that the Forum, one year after its first meeting, is already **a consolidated tool** to promote migrant integration in the European Union. This good start should encourage us to work hand in hand in the coming years.

Civil society representatives play a key role in this process. This is why last year the Commission launched the Forum and the European

Web Site on Integration. If we are happy to see their success, we are also working on their improvement every day.

The **European Web Site on Integration** provides information for practitioners sent by practitioners themselves. Therefore, your contribution is essential to keep it alive.

In the coming months, we will also develop a new tool on the Web Site for you **to prepare future meetings of the Forum on-line**. We want the Web Site to be a 'virtual' forum between 'real' forums.

The 2005 Common Agenda for Integration has been completed. All the initiatives announced five years ago, including this Forum, have been developed. The last one is the third edition of the '**Handbook on Integration**' that you could find in the entrance. The three handbooks provide examples and good practices on all areas covered by the **Common Basic Principles** for immigrant integration policy.

These principles will be part of for the **Second European Agenda for Integration**, which will point out our main tasks for the coming years.

Last December, through the **Stockholm Programme**, Member States invited the Commission to develop a **coordination mechanism** for integration policies. **In this context, indicators** are relevant and as requested by the Council earlier this month, the Commission will develop a pilot project to evaluate integration policies in four areas: **employment, education, social inclusion and citizenship**.

The Stockholm Programme also refers to the importance of mainstreaming integration into other relevant policy areas through a better coordination and knowledge exchange.

The Commission will now start to prepare the Second European Agenda for Integration in partnership with you, with the Member States and with the other EU institutions.

Member States already gave their first views at the Zaragoza Conference and will further contribute to the new Agenda through regular meetings of the **National Contact Points on Integration**.

The **European Parliament** is a close partner in the integration process. This will be intensified thanks to the new legal basis introduced by the **Lisbon Treaty**, which states that the Parliament shall work with the Council in co-decision when establishing measures to promote integration.

The Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee contribute regularly to this important aspect of immigration policy. The contributions you made in November and your discussions

today and tomorrow will be a **valuable input** to this Second Agenda that the Commission will propose next year.

In the last meeting of the Forum, participants highlighted the importance of public perception in the integration process and several Ministers commented on the role of the media to support integration at the conference in Zaragoza.

We must work actively to safeguard that there is a **fair portrayal of immigration and migrants in the media**. Tolerance and diversity are core values of the European Union and it is the duty of politicians in favour of openness to show leadership and make it clear that immigration also means opportunities, not only challenges. This does not mean that there should be Commission propaganda or political steering of the media, but we have to be aware of that the pictures we are given through media way shapes our perception of reality in a powerful way. For my own part, I try to avoid to speak about migrants as "illegal" or as a "burden" to society and rather use words as "irregular" and "responsibility sharing". These are just examples, but I find it important to encourage awareness of the power of the choice of words.

The media are also powerful **tools for socialisation and language learning**. Modern technologies allow us all to easily access media from all over the world, which essentially is a good thing. It broadens our perspectives and fosters diversity in our societies. However, this also carries the potential of excluding you from the society you live in. It is therefore crucial that media tries to broaden itself and realise the importance of being interesting and relevant to migrants. Bilingual emissions and ensuring representation of journalists of different backgrounds are two important aspects of this..

Indeed, European societies are more and more diverse. We are opening a new phase in the active promotion of diversity and migrant integration. **The Commission counts on your contribution**, together with national, regional and local authorities and other EU institutions.

During the next two months you will have the opportunity to continue to contribute to the Second European Agenda for Integration by e-mail. You and your partner associations in each Member State are the people who make integration work in cities and neighbourhoods. Your coordination at different levels is essential to send us valuable and regular input in the years to come. Thank you for your attention, I wish you a successful conference.

