

**Forth European ministerial conference on Integration
Zaragoza 15/16th of April 2010**

Commissioner Cecilia Malmström

OPENING SESSION

Integration under the Lisbon Treaty and the Stockholm Programme

- Mr President, dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen. I would like to thank the Spanish Presidency for having organised this 4th Ministerial Conference on Integration. It is a true honour and joy for me to be here with you today
- The current **economic and financial crisis** has placed immigration and integration among the highest of European priorities. The discussion on this key issue takes place at an appropriate moment. The **Lisbon Treaty** has finally entered into force and the **Stockholm Programme** has been approved.
- With the 'Handbook' that you have just received, the European Commission has finalised the 2005 Common Agenda for Integration. We now have start developing a **new strategy, a new agenda, for the coming years.**

Facing demographic challenges

- With almost 23 million people unemployed in the European Union, it is easy to consider that migrants from outside the EU

are no longer needed. However, this conclusion is wrong. We are facing **demographic challenges that will remain far beyond the economic crisis**. A less open Europe would simply make our social model unsustainable. With an ageing society, the contribution of migrants is critical.

- As the baby-boom generation retires, the EU's active population will start to shrink from 2013 onwards. The number of people aged over 60 is now increasing twice as fast as it did before 2007 (– by about 2 million every year compared to 1 million previously). The combination of a smaller working population and a higher number of retired people will indeed place strains on our welfare systems.
- Already today, thousands of third-country nationals provide care for elderly Europeans. Last month, following the Commission's Communication '**Europe 2020**', the **European Council** agreed on several headline targets. Among them was the aim "to bring to 75% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64, including through the greater participation of youth, older workers and low skilled workers and the **better integration of legal migrants**".
- However, figures alone will not make immigration something natural to many citizens. History has taught us that racism and xenophobia are easily fuelled by recession. Immigration should enrich our societies both economically and culturally, but this

will not happen unless we **promote the integration of those who came to live and work with us.**

- We therefore cannot accept discrimination. We have to admit that immigrants are still being denied jobs because of their origin. Successful integration means **equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all residents.** In practical terms, this means that employment and education rates of EU citizens should not be substantially different from those coming from third countries.
- **Integration is a long-term process and a shared responsibility** between migrants and host citizens and it should be tackled by administrations at all levels.

From Vichy to Zaragoza

- During the last Ministerial Conference on Integration in Vichy, Member States agreed on a set of short-term priorities. The Commission has released a report on '**The consolidation of the EU framework on integration**', which gives account of the latest developments on these priorities, (namely the promotion of common EU values, the gathering of the general public's perception of migrants and the development of modules and indicators).

- I am pleased to present the third edition of the '**Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners**'. Almost 600 experts have been working on this project and the result is a vast range of practical examples on active citizenship, immigrant youth and other topics that complete the two past editions.
- The Commission has increased its efforts to **communicate integration better**. It has launched the **European Web Site on Integration** and has convened the first two meetings of the **European Integration Forum**. During my mandate, I hope this Forum can be a permanent source of exchange and ideas coming from people who work on integration in cities and neighbourhoods, people from different backgrounds, but who are all committed to make integration work.
- We also have the European Integration Fund, which finances every year dozens of flagship integration projects – with €106 million to be allocated in 2010 alone.

A new EU strategy for integration

- Building on the work of the last five years, we should prepare the future and a possible **new EU strategy on integration**. Integration is not a single policy area, but a dimension that must be considered when taking decisions in many fields, for example employment, education, social inclusion and non-discrimination.

- The new legal basis provided by the **Lisbon Treaty** will allow us to propose a more comprehensive action on integration. For the first time, the Treaty foresees EU action to promote integration and places the European Parliament at the same level as the Council in this field. The Treaty rightly excludes harmonisation, since the EU cannot and should not promote a single European policy on integration. Mainstreaming integration into all relevant policy areas must be a priority for public and private actors alike, as problems very often are common to other categories of population than the legally residing third-country nationals targeted by the Treaty.
- The EU should continue to base its work on the **Common Basic Principles** agreed by the Member States in 2004. They cover all relevant areas of integration and put an emphasis on the interaction between migrants and Member State citizens.
- Integration has been a part of the EU agenda since 1999, when the European Council agreed in Tampere 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. This means access to education and healthcare, the right to work as an employee or self-employed person and the right to be treated on an equal basis.

- This also means that migrants should be offered the opportunity to obtain the nationality of the Member State in which they are resident.
- Last December, through the approval of the **Stockholm Programme**, Member States invited the Commission to develop a **coordination mechanism** for integration policies. Coordination must be based on a common set of **indicators** which contribute to a common language on integration policies. When comparing integration policies we do not seek competition but mutual learning, we do not want to use such comparisons to blame but instead to guide future decisions towards success. This Conference is a good opportunity to boost this process.
- The new coordination mechanism will have to take into account **European modules** to be developed in the coming months. These modules will cover language and introductory courses for newly arrived, measures to encourage commitment by the host society and initiatives to encourage active participation of migrants in public life. Targeting both migrants and host communities, the modules aim to promote the idea of **integration as a two-way process**. They are meant to help guiding integration policies in all Member States.

- Successful integration of immigrants will not happen by chance; it must be promoted actively. **It is time to open a new period** and the Commission counts on contribution from the Member States, the European Parliament and from the European Integration Forum.
- Immigration is crucial for the future. Europe cannot let economic recession decrease its openness to the outside world, nor let it nurture racism and xenophobia. **We must support migrant integration and diversity** not only because they are economically beneficial, but because they enrich our societies and open opportunities for all. Thank you for your attention, I look forward to our discussion.