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Migrants, intercultural dialogue and integration

Motion for a recommendation¹

tabled by Mr René van der LINDEN and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

The European Day on Migration and Integration, which was held in the historic city of Aachen on 19 and 20 November 2007 and organised jointly by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, had a particular focus on intercultural dialogue.

The debate had two main focuses. The first was on policies of integration in multicultural societies: challenges and perspectives. The second was on migration, diversity, intercultural dialogue and inter-religious understanding: conditions and political framework.

The conference agreed that migrants are an integral and important part of European society. Although at times migration has led to tensions in host countries, presentday Europe is composed of a mix of people from different origins and backgrounds. Europe as a whole is a true multicultural and multi-ethnic society with a rich and diversified cultural heritage.

Integration can never be a one-sided adaptation process. It demands a readiness of the host society and of migrants to take part in a frank dialogue. Integration is much more than simply "living together". It requires a culture of mutual respect. The families and parents of migrant children can play a particularly important role.

Integration policy is not only a responsibility for the state. Integration depends on the active co-operation of all sectors of civil society and on the positive attitude of migrants. Countries of origin can also contribute, in an important manner, to the integration of their emigrants in European host countries.

The political ambition manifested through the European Day on Migration and Integration in Aachen was the design of policy measures that will encourage and facilitate integration of all persons in their respective countries and in Europe as a whole. A priority in this work is to preserve and protect cultural diversity and intercultural co-operation, dialogue, understanding and respect.

An important aspect of such policy is the respect for human rights, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy. A particular priority should be given to women's and children's rights. Any tradition or initiative that aims or contains elements contrary to these principles cannot be tolerated. Above all, there is no place for discrimination, intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia in Europe.

Migrants in Europe must be assured an equal right to participate in the societies in which they live, and to assume responsibilities, including political, at local, regional, national and European levels. An integration policy must be a joint project between migrants and society that will assure migrants the same level of education and access to the labour market as the host population.

1. Referred to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, to take it into account in the preparation of the report on "Migration in Europe: a constant challenge": Reference No. 3485 (29th Sitting, 29 September 2008).



Young migrants living in Europe are a great potential for the continent. This potential can only be utilised when these new members of European society are empowered to fully take part in society. This includes their full economic, political and social participation, comprising voting rights in local, national and European elections, where appropriate.

It is important that the active participation of young migrants in various programmes and activities promoting integration organised by youth associations and NGOs – which are key links between young migrants and society – is supported more actively by various European and international institutions.

Interfaith dialogue is part of intercultural dialogue. In many cases extremist positions can hamper a constructive exchange of views as well as mutual understanding and respect. This dialogue must be open to all and not limited to religious leaders who nonetheless have a particularly important role to play. The dialogue should increasingly involve elected representatives of faith communities.

A good knowledge of the local language is of fundamental importance. Successful integration is favoured by early acquisition of this language. Language learning of the host society language by migrant children should be encouraged while respecting the need for children to also learn their mother tongue. It is not only the education system that is important in this context. Other institutions and associations (sports, diasporas, media, different NGOs, etc.) can also contribute to the integration process.

Working life has a particularly important function for the integration of migrants. Unemployment is a fundamental obstacle for successful integration of migrants. This is unfortunately a grave problem for many young migrants. Industry and commerce, and also public institutions have in several cases played a pioneering role in the integration process and in fostering multicultural dialogue, understanding, respect and tolerance. Such work must be made better known and be rewarded.

Diasporas in Europe could be even more involved in promoting development co-operation as well as multicultural understanding, dialogue and integration. Worker mobility and circular migration could play a positive role for countries of origin, host countries and migrants themselves, including their families. A good co-operation between countries of origin and host countries, as well as a good mutual understanding between them, would facilitate and further such positive developments (remittances, investments, education and training, etc.). Countries of origin should assist their diaspora in keeping close links with their home country in order that both migrants and their countries of origin can benefit from the migration process, both in the short and long term.

Multicultural Europe must encourage and reward the knowledge of languages and the understanding of different cultures. European states and institutions can work together to foster this endeavour. In the context of the European Day on Migration and Integration the proposal was made to ask the Council of Europe, the European Union and their member states to organise a European Day for Integration and Intercultural Tolerance every year. Aachen and its Charlemagne Prize Foundation should be closely associated with this European Day.

It is particularly important to fully involve young people and schools, but also civil society, in the promotion of a tolerant and multicultural Europe as a natural home for all persons, regardless of their background and origin. Peace and co-operation in Europe based on common values of equality, human rights and democracy must be promoted by all means. The proposed European Day will be one of the contributions towards this goal.

The event should have a local, regional, national and European character. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly and also the European Parliament and other relevant EU institutions as well as civil society, economic partners, migrants' associations as well as religious communities must be fully involved.

The Assembly, in line with the above, recommends to the Committee of Ministers to instruct the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe to:

- analyse what the Council of Europe, within its specific mandate, and in co-operation with other partners, can do to foster a positive intercultural dialogue, intercultural understanding, mutual respect and tolerance;
- assess the feasibility of organising a European Day for Integration and Intercultural Tolerance;
- encourage the youth sector to play an active part in such activities.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed²:

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2. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
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