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Democratic participation for migrant diasporas

Report¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

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Summary

In recent years, diaspora communities have started to play a more active role in the political life of both their countries of origin and their countries of residence. The rapid increase in working migrants, the desire of retired migrants to return and live in their countries of origin, and the wish of many migrants to be able to play a more active role in the political life of their host countries as well as in their countries of origin, represent new challenges in many policy sectors.

This report provides an analysis of existing national policies and international initiatives supportive of diasporas' involvement in political life and makes recommendations to improve the democratic participation of diasporas in Europe.

It calls on the governments of European countries to play a key role in engaging diasporas in decision-making processes, and to develop collaboration between governmental institutions in drafting diaspora-oriented programmes to ensure economic, social and cultural development.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 13272](#), Reference 3993 of 30 September 2013.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. Today, diasporas play a more prominent role in politics than in the past. The members of diasporas can help to build bridges between States and to promote democracy both in their countries of residence and in their countries of origin.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that diasporas' right to democratic participation is a fundamental condition for their political integration. Regrettably, most European countries still deprive migrants of the right to vote despite their advanced policies of integration. Unless the migrants and local residents of all backgrounds are given the right to vote, at least in the local elections, the process of integration will remain incomplete.
3. The Assembly considers that allowing dual citizenship or introducing, in their countries of origin, a special legal status for nationals living abroad would encourage their constructive involvement in policy shaping in their home countries. However, the dual citizenship status should not be misused to promote expansionist policies and violate the sovereignty of other States.
4. Furthermore, the Assembly encourages co-ordination between the governments of the countries of residence and the countries of origin in addressing the issues of the political status and participation in local, regional, and national elections of people holding double nationality.
5. The Assembly believes that governments, both in host countries and countries of origin, have to play a key role in engaging diasporas in decision-making policies, developing collaboration between governmental institutions and formulating recommendations on drafting diaspora-oriented programmes to ensure economic, social and cultural development.
6. The Assembly welcomes the role of diaspora associations in helping migrants integrate into the host society.
7. The Assembly is especially concerned about the rise of racism and xenophobia in Europe and stresses the role that diaspora policies can play in fighting these extremist tendencies.
8. The media have a major role to play in countering the binary stereotypes of migrants as victims or criminals. Television channels, newspapers and electronic media should give them genuine opportunities to portray their economic and intellectual potential, which benefits both their country of residence and their country of origin.
9. With the aim of improving the democratic participation of diasporas in Europe, the Assembly calls on member States to:
 - 9.1. ensure the effective exercise of the voting rights of members of diasporas, and in particular:
 - 9.1.1. sign and ratify the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144), if they have not already done so;
 - 9.1.2. introduce the right to vote and to stand in local and regional elections for foreigners after a maximum residence period of five years;
 - 9.1.3. simplify the electoral legislation with regard to external voting, including the extension of proxy, postal and e-voting to diaspora members, and introduce effective measures aimed at ensuring the exercise of the right to an external vote for those concerned;
 - 9.1.4. establish bilateral committees composed of lawmakers from the country of residence and the country of origin to examine complex cases relating to the dual citizen's active political participation in more than one country;
 - 9.2. introduce policies which would facilitate diaspora involvement in political life, and in particular:
 - 9.2.1. review national legislation with a view to granting a special status to members of diasporas in their countries of origin, delivering a residence and work permit, and facilitating the return process where appropriate;
 - 9.2.2. promote diaspora members' contribution to the development of their country of origin by, *inter alia*, transfer of their knowledge, education and experience;

2. Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 27 November 2014.

- 9.2.3. co-ordinate the integration policies of host countries with the diaspora-related programmes of countries of origin with a view to achieving a bigger impact;
 - 9.2.4. ensure policy coherence between measures targeting diasporas abroad and migrant diasporas in the host countries;
 - 9.2.5. create specific ministries or intergovernmental structures to deal with diaspora policy;
 - 9.2.6. actively involve members of diaspora organisations in the development of integration programmes for migrants;
 - 9.2.7. in regions with settled diasporas, develop strategies of co-operation with diasporas at the local level;
 - 9.2.8. ensure that diplomatic representations have staff trained to deal with issues of concern for diaspora;
 - 9.3. promote the activities of diaspora organisations:
 - 9.3.1. supporting the initiatives of diaspora organisations through specific budgetary programmes;
 - 9.3.2. encouraging political parties to involve diaspora members in their activities;
 - 9.3.3. encouraging the use of new communication technologies with a view to reinforcing links between different diaspora organisations;
 - 9.3.4. creating a database on the activities and networks of diaspora organisations.
10. The Assembly invites international organisations, in particular the United Nations, the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Interparliamentary Union (IPU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union, to promote and protect the cultural and political rights of diasporas and to support projects aimed at their democratic participation.
11. The Assembly considers that it could act as a platform for developing a parliamentary dialogue on diaspora participation by proposing the creation of a parliamentary network on diaspora policies.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Rigoni, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Over the last centuries, different waves of migration have led to the settlement of migrant diasporas in many European countries. In recent decades, these diaspora communities have started to play a more active role in the policies of both their countries of origin and their countries of residence. The rapid increase in working migration, the desire of retired migrants to return and to live in their countries of origin, and the wish of many migrants to be able to take a more active part in the political life of their host countries as well as in their countries of origin, represent new challenges in many policy sectors.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly has been dealing with diasporas settled in Europe, mostly from a cultural and political perspective. In 1999, it adopted [Recommendation 1410 \(1999\)](#) on links between Europeans living abroad and their countries of origin, and in 2009, [Resolution 1696 \(2009\)](#) and [Recommendation 1890 \(2009\)](#) “Engaging European diasporas: the need for governmental and intergovernmental responses”. In these documents, the Assembly underlined the need for greater political participation of migrants, which would enhance their capacity to promote and transfer democratic values. The Assembly also called on its member States to elaborate migration policies which promote an institutional role for diasporas.

3. In the present report, I am aiming at a deeper analysis of existing national policies and international initiatives supportive of diasporas’ involvement in political life.

1.1. Definition of diaspora

4. The classical definition of the diaspora as a scattered group of people uprooted from their original land is no longer valid. In the modern context, the diaspora is any group of migrants integrated within the host society, mainly in Europe and the United States, who choose to maintain a strong attachment to their original cultures and countries. That attachment is not merely symbolic or cultural, but has developed over the past decades to include strong economic and political ties.

5. In this report, I would like to use the definition of diaspora given by Gerard-Francois Dumont, which seems to me the most complete one. He defines diaspora as “a community of individuals living together on the same territory and having in common the conviction or belief of belonging, themselves or their families, to another territory with which they maintain regular relations”.

6. It is also important to make a distinction between a cultural and political approach to diaspora. The former seeks to advance the cultural rights of the diaspora groups regardless of their political participation. The latter emphasises their political rights and obligations. I will focus on this aspect.

7. For today’s migrant diasporas, getting involved in the life of their community of origin is a choice. Immigrants can, in many cases, acquire citizenship of their country of residence and no longer have to be inevitably linked to a minority group.

8. These links with the country of origin are facilitated by the globalisation process, which facilitates the circulation of information, goods and services. It has become much easier for people to travel abroad and to maintain ties with their families. This phenomenon of “diasporisation” of migration opens new opportunities for migrants and the countries to which they are attached.

9. However, I would be opposed to the policies which divide diasporas into two categories, as is done in Serbia by the “Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region”. Such an approach to the diaspora issue could be counterproductive towards the integration of Serbs living in neighbouring countries, as it could give rise to tensions. In the case of second-generation diaspora, such policies could lead to conflicts within families.

1.2. Diasporas as a bridge between migrants, their countries of residence and their countries of origin

10. Diasporas should neither be reduced to the country of residence nor to the country of origin. Rather, the diaspora is a third identity that exists in-between and feeds on the traffic, real or imaginative, between the two countries. In many cases, the diaspora establishes that traffic, creating a spontaneous medium that brings countries together culturally, economically, and politically.

11. The diaspora is a cultural, economic, and political bridge between the country of residence and the country of origin. Through such channels as literature, the arts, media, and sport, the diaspora brings together two worlds in a dynamic relationship.

12. Bilingualism of diaspora members should be seen as an asset in the globalised world economy. It should therefore be promoted.

13. Diasporas have a longstanding tradition of economic support towards people living in the country of origin. Remittances sent by diaspora members often play a major role in certain national economies of countries of origin and help them to be competitive in international trade relations. But what is new is that increased activity of diasporas may cause a questioning of existing relations between States, and thus contribute to strengthening contacts between countries of origin and residence.

14. Furthermore, as a potential force of reconciliation, the diaspora may transform the tensions of the past into future opportunities for co-operation between the country of residence and the country of origin. Its cultural specificities are proven to enrich, rather than undermine, the progress of modern societies.

1.3. The role of diasporas in democratic change

15. Diasporas also contribute to the shattering of pre-existing negative stereotypes held in either the origin or destination countries. In fact, the diaspora is a reconciling force which helps us overcome the political traumas of the past. In the context of Maghreb countries, the diaspora transformed people's image of Europe from French or Spanish colonial power into that of a modern and democratic Europe full of opportunities for individual success and economic prosperity.

16. Those diaspora communities which live in democratic countries are usually eager to promote in their countries of origin the values they consider positive in their country of residence. More generally, migrants in their majority are carriers of universal values, creating a plural discourse which promotes peace and dialogue between diverse civilisations and traditions.

17. In the last two decades, diasporas became one of the driving forces in bringing democratic experience to their countries of origin. Diaspora organisations were very active in establishing and developing civil society in many central and eastern European countries. They made a big contribution to the nation-building process. In Latvia, Lithuania and Georgia, to take a few examples, the representatives of returned diasporas actively participated in the political leadership of these countries.

18. Members of diaspora visiting their countries of origin expect the same civil treatment they enjoy in their countries of residence: transparency, accountability, gender equality, equal opportunity, and a fair justice system. Their exposure to democratic values turns them into advocates for democracy and human rights. Their political and social participation in their communities of origin also leads them to fight discrimination and economic disparities.

2. The right to vote for diaspora members

19. The political participation of diasporas remains a major issue for its members. Generally speaking, the diaspora groups should be allowed to participate in any electoral process that affects their daily lives.

20. A distinction needs to be made between those members of the diaspora who, while being legal migrants, do not hold citizenship of the host country, and those who have double citizenship of the host country and the country of origin. While citizens can obviously vote in a host country, not all legal migrants have this right.

21. Allowing citizens abroad to vote in their country of origin is important for two reasons. First, we cannot forget that diasporas participate actively in the well-being of people still living in the country of origin. The Moroccan diaspora, for example, is present in more than 100 countries. It is closely tied to its country of origin and has developed a robust financial bridge between countries of residence and Morocco (according to certain estimates, Moroccan remittances are among the most important in the world).³ Secondly, enabling citizens to vote from abroad is not only a matter of equality between resident citizens and non-resident citizens, but also between nationals living abroad in general. Indeed, wealthy non-resident citizens can benefit

3. Cesari (2013), "Les réseaux transnationaux entre l'Europe et le Maghreb: l'international sans territoire", *Hommes & migrations*, No. 1303-3, pp. 37-45.

from formal and informal channels to bring their concerns to the political scene, and therefore have an impact on the decision-making process, whereas less wealthy citizens living abroad are deprived of their only way to become involved in politics in their country of origin.

2.1. Diasporas voting in the countries of origin

22. Despite the fact that the extension of voting rights in the country of origin to diasporas should logically stem from the citizenship status of individuals living abroad, allowing external voting remains the prerogative of each State.

23. Most of the Council of Europe member States allow their citizens to exercise their voting rights from outside the territory of their country of origin.

24. Two issues are at stake when it comes to the question of external voting: the right to vote and to stand for election in different types of elections, and the modalities of voting from abroad (see Appendix 1).

25. The right to vote and to be elected is essential in ensuring democratic participation of diaspora members. Most European countries allow for the participation of their citizens in external voting, but some countries impose restrictions related to the length of stay abroad or activity-related. However, there are countries such as Ireland, where only people carrying out official missions of a diplomatic or military nature can vote abroad. In some other countries, there are restrictions with regard to the length of stay abroad; beyond the limit, citizens lose their voting rights. In Germany, it is 25 years and in the United Kingdom 15 years.

26. In practice, participation in external voting can be hindered by bureaucratic and legal requirements related to the registration of voters or the voting procedure. Thus, the registration of voters is often done by diplomatic missions, which might cover very big regions of potential voters. Due to financial and logistical problems voters may not always be able to travel to diplomatic missions situated in other cities. Such difficulties could be easily overcome by the wider introduction of postal and electronic registration and voting.

27. The European States use four main voting forms: in-person, postal, proxy and electronic vote (e-voting). However, a majority of countries are making use of in-person voting (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Ukraine), meaning that citizens cast their vote at polling stations, which are generally located in embassies. The second most common form is postal voting. It is practiced in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Slovak Republic and Spain. Proxy voting is used in the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Only three countries of the Council of Europe use e-voting (Estonia, France and Switzerland). Several countries allow for two forms of voting: in-person and postal voting (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, and Slovenia); postal and proxy voting (the Netherlands and the United Kingdom); or more than two forms (Belgium, Estonia, France, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland). Finally, Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Greece, Malta and San Marino still do not allow external voting. The choice of a form of voting is crucial: it is proven that in-person voting will favour citizens living in capital cities, and proxy voting (including postal and e-voting) will be avoided by people abroad as there is no real guarantee of the respect of their will. Direct voting (including postal and e-voting) is the most effective way to ensure fair political participation for non-resident citizens.

28. The types of elections in which non-resident citizens are entitled to vote also differ widely among countries. For example, Germany allows its non-resident citizens to vote in legislative elections only, whereas French citizens abroad may vote in presidential and legislative elections as well as in referendums.

29. Denmark, Ireland, Cyprus and Malta do not allow their citizens to take part in national or regional elections once they leave their home country.⁴ The recent Eurobarometer survey on electoral rights has shown that almost two thirds of Europeans would not consider such legislative provisions as justified.⁵ To tackle this problem, the European Commission issued guidance to the member States which still practise disenfranchisement. It invites the relevant member States to enable their citizens living abroad to retain their right to vote in national elections if they show an interest in the political life of their country, for example by applying to remain on the electoral roll.⁶

4. Reding defends right to vote for EU, 30 January 2014, Euractive.

5. Electoral Rights, Flash Eurobarometer 364, March 2013.

6. Disenfranchisement: Commission acts to defend voting rights of EU citizens abroad, Press Release, European Commission, Brussels, 29 January 2014.

30. Electronic means are playing an increasing role in extending democracy and in building democratic bridges between States. In 2004, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation Rec(2004)11 defining general standards for electronic voting with a view to preventing any type of fraud, and in 2007, the Assembly adopted [Resolution 1591 \(2007\)](#) on distance voting, which calls on member States to introduce external voting.

31. The introduction of e-voting as additional form of casting votes can significantly facilitate participation of diasporas in elections. The practice of remote e-voting by Estonian voters abroad has shown that it reduces transaction costs and enhances efficiency in the voting process, but has not really increased voter participation. The governments of the Council of Europe member States could address the issue of e-voting, as it can make external voting cheaper and more accessible.

32. Some European countries offer the possibility to their diaspora members to have their interests represented in the national parliament. Since 1948, France has given its diaspora members the right to elect 12 senators. And since 2012, the diaspora has also been represented in the National Assembly. In my country, the members of the Italian diaspora have the possibility to elect by mail 12 representatives in the national parliament and 6 senators to represent their interests. The positive practice of Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal and Romania should be followed by other European States.

2.2. Diaspora voting in the countries of residence

33. Among Council of Europe member States, the situation regarding the right of foreigners to vote is diverse. For legislative and presidential elections, almost without exception, it is only citizens that can vote. At the local level, the situation is different and many countries give the right to vote to foreigners legally residing on their territory after a certain period, for example five years. Indeed, the Council of Europe's Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local level (ETS No. 144) includes this as one of its standards. But some countries are still reluctant to allow foreigners to vote.

34. In the European Union, all European Union citizens have the right to vote and to stand as candidates in local and European elections in their country of residence on the same basis as nationals. However, 13 European Union countries do not extend this right to national or regional elections.

35. Disparities are still significant between the member States, in particular at local level. France, for instance, does not allow non-European Union foreigners to vote, even at local level. The debate over the issue of voting rights for foreigners has lasted for 30 years and is still profoundly divisive for French society.⁷ In Belgium, Germany, Ireland and Sweden, non-European Union citizens may vote at the local level.⁸

36. Moreover, the right of foreigners to vote in national or local elections also involves the issue of States' bilateral relations, since many countries allow only non-EU foreigners to vote if they are coming from a country where their own citizens are allowed to vote; for instance, Portugal allows non-European Union citizens to vote in the local elections only on a reciprocal basis.⁹

37. The classification of migrants according to their origins should not be relevant when it comes to the question of voting rights for foreigners. Unfortunately, I must stress that it remains often the only criterion on which the right to vote for foreigners is based.

38. Most countries in the world, including the European Union, still deprive foreigners of the right to vote despite their advanced policies of integration. Unless the migrants are given the right to vote, at least in local elections, any process of integration will remain incomplete.

39. Granting voting rights to migrants in the country of residence will protect them to a certain extent against the racial stereotypes to which they may be subjected in political campaigns. As a political group, the migrant diasporas will be attractive to the standing political parties instead of being used as scapegoats to lure racist and populist votes.

40. The implementation of the right to vote and to stand for election for diasporas in the countries of residence enables diaspora members to take part in decision-making process on issues related to their day-to-day life and to make them responsible members of society.

7. Hervé Andres, Political Participation and voting rights of foreign residents in France: a policy brief, Migration Citizenship Education, *Migration Citizenship Education*, 2009.

8. Ibid.

9. Portuguese Ministry of Finance and Public Administration, *Guidelines for foreign citizens*, www.dgap.gov.pt/eng/index.cfm?OBJID=eb0dd6be-e6e2-46e4-9f39-d5975d5c966d.

2.3. Barriers to diaspora involvement in voting

41. There are several barriers to diaspora involvement: they face numerous obstacles to political participation in both their country of origin and their country of residence.
42. Even if the countries of origin enable their citizens abroad to vote, legal provisions to allow external voting to take place are often lacking. The means available (in-person, postal, proxy) do not guarantee equal access to ballots for resident citizens and non-resident citizens, and thus lead to abstentionism, which in turn justifies positions against the extension of external voting. Moreover, the number of elections in which non-resident citizens can vote is limited.
43. For the countries with a considerable number of citizens living abroad (for example Armenia, Russia, Turkey), the participation of diasporas in national elections could be crucial for the results of the election. This may partly explain the reluctance of these countries to introduce external voting into their legislation.
44. Diaspora voting cannot be considered without taking into account the financial and organisational aspects of the electoral process. It needs serious financial and human resources investments and is often linked to logistical difficulties. Moreover, for the countries which face problems in the organisation of elections on their territory, it might be even more difficult to ensure a secure electoral process abroad, especially in the countries with important diaspora representation.¹⁰
45. The lack of democratic institutions in the country of origin is the biggest obstacle to the diaspora's involvement in politics.
46. Xenophobia is another common reason why members of diaspora communities prefer to abandon the political field and view it as a source of trouble rather than of social empowerment.
47. Political parties usually do not offer special programmes to attract voters and candidates among diaspora communities.
48. All these problems have to be taken into consideration in order to improve political participation for migrant diasporas.

2.4. Case studies of diaspora voting

2.4.1. Serbia

49. The right of the Serbian diaspora to participate in national elections was instituted in 2004. Since then, three elections have taken place. Diaspora members can vote in the diplomatic missions or in Serbia.
50. During the last elections, out of four million Serbian people living abroad, only 6 800 people registered to vote. This low turnout of the diaspora in the elections can be explained by political and procedural reasons. The policies of previous Serbian authorities which had been hostile to the diaspora – as it represented political opposition – discouraged its involvement in the political life of Serbia. Serbs living in neighbouring countries were the target of attempts at instrumentalisation by politicians in Serbia and were often marginalised in the countries where they live.
51. As regards the procedural reasons, the main problems were an insufficient number of polling stations, the requirement for voters to register for the voting 20 days before the elections, and the vote in person at the voting station, which in practice made people travel twice to the polling station, once for the registration and again for the vote itself. As a result, out of 6 800 registered diaspora voters only 4 826 had voted.
52. I think that these political and procedural reasons, which hampered the Serbian diaspora's active participation in the elections, need thorough analysis by the Serbian authorities. They may wish to intensify their work on establishing much closer communications with the Serbian diaspora, involve it in the preparation of elections and simplify voting procedures.
53. As regards the political participation of the diaspora in Serbia itself, I welcome the intention of the Serbian Parliament to reserve seats in the parliament for the representatives of minorities.

10. Voting from Abroad, Chapter 3. The legal framework and an overview of electoral legislation, Dieter Nohlen and Florian Grotz, International IDEA/IFE, 2007, p. 73.

2.4.2. Turkey

54. On 10 August 2014, Turkey held its presidential election, and for the first time the Turkish diaspora was allowed to register to vote abroad. In Europe, there are around four million Turkish citizens, of which three million live in Germany. The Netherlands, France, Belgium and Austria also have a large number of Turkish migrants. During previous elections, the Turkish diaspora was only permitted to vote at the border controls of Turkey, but after the adoption in 2012 of the amendment to the law on elections, 103 polling stations were opened in 54 countries. Taking into account over 52 million eligible voters in Turkey, the diaspora vote matters for political parties since it makes up some 5% of the total.

55. The main concern that Turkey had in the preparation of the election was a certain resistance of the countries of residence to co-operate in the organisation of the voting process. This concerned first of all Germany, where due to a great number of voters, the voting process had to take place over several days and required important human and financial resources.

56. The results of the presidential election have shown that out of almost 2.8 million members of the Turkish diaspora eligible for voting, only 232 000 actually voted. The main reasons for the low turnout were procedural and logistical problems.¹¹

57. Some voters had to travel long distances to reach the voting centres. In Germany, which, as mentioned, hosts nearly three million Turks, there were only seven polling stations and voters were sometimes forced to travel hundreds of kilometres to cast their vote.

58. Furthermore, Turkish citizens were required to get an appointment prior to the election period from embassies in their countries of residence, so as to register as voters. However, some of them did not even know about it. The appointment system was a failure, as many people returned without having registered or cast their vote, as they were late and were turned away.

59. Electoral legislation gave the Election Council the authority to oblige voters to make appointments, but made exceptions where the number was too high to manage. Many people were not allowed to vote if they missed their appointment time. The board had earlier rejected the ruling AK Party's appeal for appointment-free dates for voters.

60. In general, the organisation of diaspora voting was very expensive. The costs involved for one vote cast overseas was 38 times higher than a single vote in Turkey itself due to the low turnout. A vote abroad cost the State on average almost US\$140, while the cost in Turkey was less than US\$4. Turkey had allocated more than US\$30 million for diaspora voting.¹²

61. To my mind, although voting in person is the most common way for diaspora participation, proxy and postal voting are other methods which enable overseas citizens to cast their votes, and are used by more than 60 countries. Voting via the Internet is also used in some countries. To facilitate the voting process, Turkey could consider the introduction of these forms of diaspora voting in the future.

3. National policies promoting diaspora involvement in political life

3.1. Governmental policies and strategies in the countries of origin

3.1.1. Dual citizenship

62. There are several reasons why countries of origin are interested in defining governmental policies and strategies with regard to diasporas. Above all, in a time of transnational population movement, it is crucial to keep a link with migrant communities, especially if they can exercise their right to vote.

63. One of the ways to keep diaspora members active in their country of origin is to allow them the possibility of dual citizenship. More and more countries are following this practice.

64. At the same time, some countries of origin are very reticent to follow this practice, in part because they fear how overseas votes could significantly influence election results.

11. Turkey's expanding democracy. Opinion, *Daily Sabah*, 11 August 2014.

12. Hype fails to match reality for Turkey's overseas voters, Furkan Naci Top, Anadolu agency, 6 August 2014.

65. The introduction of dual citizenship in Morocco, for example, allows migrants to be influential in the social, cultural and political transformation of Moroccan society. In the 1970s and 80s, migrants became so inspired by the European values of justice, transparency and freedom that they then appropriated these values as universal, using them to develop the remote and rural areas of Morocco where the State was not active. The Moroccan diaspora furthermore acts as a pressure group, which challenges both society and the State to modernise institutional and cultural practices, reform domestic laws, such as gender relations, reduce the economic gaps between the city and the country, and promote education among women and the poor.

66. In Serbia, dual citizenship is a very positive practice, in particular for the Serbs in the region. Their children can go to universities in Serbia and they can travel around the world with a Serbian passport. The national minorities in Serbia are also allowed dual citizenship which allows them to maintain better contacts with their country of origin.

67. Another way of involving diasporas is to legalise their status. Having an important number of migrants (around six million), Turkey introduced a special ID “Blue Card” system for its diaspora members from the countries where dual citizenship is not permitted or when a person had renounced their Turkish citizenship. It serves as a residence and work permit in Turkey and allows them to buy a property.

68. Having said that, I would like to warn against the manipulation by some States of the status of dual citizenship for their own political interests. Dual citizenship status should not be used for promoting expansionist policies and violating the sovereignty of States.

3.1.2. Governmental institutions

69. To respond to the needs of diaspora, some countries of origin also adopt governmental policies and create special institutions in charge of relations with diasporas (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation and Turkey). Those policies are aimed at engaging the diaspora abroad and maintaining regular contacts with diaspora communities.

70. For the implementation of such policies, some countries create special governmental institutions and in some cases even appoint senior ministers (Armenia, Georgia, Serbia and Turkey) or junior ministers (France and Portugal) in charge of diaspora policies. There are also intergovernmental and parliamentary committees on diasporas which co-ordinate the work on diaspora involvement at executive and legislative levels.

71. Armenia has one of the largest diaspora communities (7,5 million people, while the population living in Armenia is only 2,5 million). The Armenian diaspora is spread across more than 100 countries around the world, with an established model system of governmental policy towards diaspora. It is co-ordinated by the Ministry of the Diaspora and includes a number of mechanisms to strengthen collaboration with the diaspora. Among them is the “Hayastan” All-Armenian Fund, headed by the President of the Republic of Armenia, which co-ordinates the financial assistance of the diaspora to Armenia. Once every three years, the ministry organises the Armenia-Diaspora Conferences to discuss issues of national concern, as well as cultural festivals and Pan-Armenian athletic games.

72. Diplomatic representation abroad also plays an important role in maintaining relations with diaspora representatives. Some European countries have introduced a position of diaspora counsellor in their embassies and consular departments. They provide legal assistance and facilitate the establishment of business and cultural contacts with their countries. In recent years, with increased migration movements, many migrants have addressed issues related to their status, administrative procedures, and welfare support to their diplomatic representatives. However, the embassies and consulates do not always have qualified staff to respond to these demands. The countries of origin should therefore strengthen their diplomatic representations with staff trained to provide assistance to diaspora members.

73. The countries of origin should pay special attention to diaspora engagement policies. In the absence of such programmes and policies in the country of origin, second- and third-generation migrants may feel as alienated as their parents or grandparents were in Europe in the 1960s and 70s. Engagement difficulties deprive them of serving their country of origin although their qualifications and professional experience are needed.

3.1.3. Involvement of diaspora communities

74. No governmental policy in support of diasporas can be successful without direct involvement of the diaspora community in the policy-planning process. Diaspora representatives can be involved in an individual capacity as experts, but such involvement can also take the form of diaspora councils. Several European countries have established such consultative bodies involving the elected representatives of different diaspora communities.

75. The countries of origin are also interested in developing diaspora lobbying abroad to support their political agenda. With this aim, they support diaspora organisations, encourage diaspora voting rights in the host country and organise diaspora forums.

76. In 2011, the Parliament of Malta adopted a law establishing the Council for Maltese People Living Abroad. The recommendations of this council are implemented by the executive institution.¹³ Estonia has also a Council of Expatriates. In this regard, Morocco also provides an interesting example. In 1990, under the patronage of King Hassan II, the Foundation for Moroccans Living Abroad was created to promote economic and cultural co-operation with the diaspora and to support them. This Foundation, in co-operation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) established an Observatory of the Moroccan Community Living Abroad (EOMC), which offers an information system for the government on migration management issues.

77. The “Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region”, adopted in Serbia in 2009, established a Diaspora Assembly, which comprises 45 delegated members from different diaspora communities. This Assembly is the highest organ of the diaspora and its main task is to identify problems of the diaspora and to develop strategies to solve them. It also establishes and appoints representatives to different diaspora councils: the Economic Council; the Status Council; and the Council for Culture, Education, Science and Sports.

78. The organisation of diaspora forums and conventions is another important way of reaching diasporas. Armenia, Malta, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation organise such forums on a regular basis. In 2013, Ireland hosted the inaugural European version of the Global Diaspora Forum in Dún Laoghaire (Dublin).

79. Diaspora members can also exercise their political influence through financial support to some political forces. This was the case in 1990 in Croatia, when the Croatian diaspora donated US\$4 million to support the electoral campaign of Franjo Tudjman. In return, they received 12 of the 120 seats in the Croatian Parliament.¹⁴ In my view, such steps can become highly problematic and should be avoided in a democratic society, where money should not influence votes.

80. Some European countries have highlighted in their policies their interest in the return of highly skilled diaspora members. The Russian Federation, for example, adopted the State Programme to assist Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian Federation. The aim of this programme is not only to attract skilled professionals, but also to improve the national demographic situation.¹⁵

81. Since 2011, a lot of progress has been made by the Serbian Ministry of Education in developing and implementing a special programme for primary schooling in the Serbian language in countries abroad. Since then, 3 685 pupils all over the world have participated in this programme. There is also a programme for diaspora students to enrol in Serbian universities: 2% of seats in all universities are reserved free of charge for diaspora students. A separate scholarship was established by “Serbia for Serbs in the Region”, providing scholarships for young people belonging to the Serbian ethnic communities in the countries of the region. A total of 40 scholarships were allocated in the academic year 2012/13.

82. It is clear that the efficiency of governmental policies on diaspora involvement in the political life of countries of origin depends on the availability of executive bodies and financial resources for their implementation. Diasporas should be actively involved in the policy-planning process to ensure that their concerns are included in State policy. Their intellectual and financial capacity could be of benefit for the implementation of certain governmental programmes. Countries of origin could also promote diaspora involvement, providing them with double nationality or special legal status and facilitating their free movement and economic activity.

13. *Diasporas and Development: Bridging Societies and States*, Diaspora Ministerial Conference, 18-19 June 2013, No. 22, International Dialogue on Migration, IOM, Geneva, p. 40.

14. *The Political importance of Diaspora*, Steven Vertovec, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Working Paper No.13, University of Oxford, 2005, p. 6.

15. *Diasporas and Development in Post-Communist Eurasia* by Timothy Heleniak, University of Maryland, American Geographical Society, Migration, Information Source, p. 6.

3.2. Responses in the countries of residence

83. As a general rule, countries of residence do not develop specific policies regarding diaspora communities. They rather consider diaspora members as migrants and include them in social inclusion or migrant integration policies.

84. However, countries which have achieved success in their migrant integration policies realise that diaspora involvement can be profitable for both countries of origin and residence. Countries such as Luxembourg, Switzerland, Portugal and Italy consider diasporas as partners in the promotion of co-operation with the countries of origin.

85. My country, Italy, has even created an office of the Minister for Integration which works directly with different diaspora associations. Italy considers diaspora organisations as partners in the migrant integration process. On the other hand, Turkey refers to integration policy as “an active participation of diaspora in the academic, social, cultural, economic and financial life of the country they live in”.¹⁶

86. Diaspora communities can also be involved with their countries of residence in the promotion of project development for their respective countries of origin. Countries such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, for example, involve diaspora communities with business structures working on development projects.

87. Some countries of origin develop a partnership with countries of residence to promote better worker mobility and to encourage the return of skilled workers (Portugal/Ukraine, Austria/Bosnia and Herzegovina). Development agencies of countries of residence work very closely with diaspora associations on different projects in their home countries. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has launched several projects with different countries on the potential of diasporas’ contribution to the development of the countries of origin.¹⁷ The development agencies of Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway support activities of diasporas in specific professional sectors or regions.¹⁸

88. In my view, countries of residence will benefit if they involve diasporas in their migrant integration policies and utilise their contacts with their countries of origin.

3.3. Activities of diaspora organisations

89. Diaspora representatives organise themselves in various forms, including: religious communities; schools; migrants associations; charitable foundations; cultural clubs; but also, branches of political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), virtual networks and investment groups.

90. Very often, the organisations of migrants who fled from their country because of the political regime remain hostile towards the governments of their countries of origin, even after political changes have taken place.¹⁹

91. The role of diaspora organisations is becoming increasingly important in the political life of some countries of origin and residence. Their activities aimed at helping their countries of origin in economic and democratic development help protect their rights as a minority group in the country of residence and express their cultural identity. They also contribute to the development of bilateral relations between the countries of origin and destination. If the situation in their country of origin is still hostile, the diaspora organisations serve as an international sounding board to voice their concerns about human rights and political freedoms.

92. With regard to the involvement of diaspora organisations in political participation in their countries of origin and residence, their main lobbying efforts are directed at the issues of citizenship, migration status and voting rights. They also express their concerns regarding issues of human rights, good governance and democratic choice.²⁰

16. Ibid., p. 28.

17. Ibid., p. 60.

18. Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners for Home and Destination Countries: Challenges for Policymakers, Dina Ionescu, IOM, p. 25.

19. Voice After Exit: Diaspora Advocacy, Kathleen Newland, Migration Policy Institute, November 2010, p. 5.

20. Ibid., p. 13.

93. Diaspora organisations also act as supporters and promoters of protest movements in their countries of origin, which are often not welcome there. In December 2013, Ukrainian diaspora organisations all over the world supported peaceful demonstrations in Ukraine for a partnership with the European Union and democratic values.

94. This year, during the floods in May 2014 in Serbia, we witnessed an active response from the Serbian diaspora to the appeal of the Serbian Government for help to provide aid for the reconstruction of affected regions. Serbian diaspora representatives sent money, food, clothes, shoes and medicine to affected areas in Serbia from all over the world. According to the Ministry of Finance, almost €700 000 was collected through PayPal accounts and more than €27 million has been donated.

95. The development of new communication technologies offers new possibilities for connections between different diaspora organisations. Such organisations actively use e-communication to promote their political views and distribute information on their activities.

96. In some diaspora communities, there is still a lack of co-operation between “old” diaspora organisations and newly arrived migrants organisations. I believe that this co-operation could be mutually beneficial. Well established diaspora groups could help migrants in their integration into the host society, and newly arrived migrants or refugees could share their knowledge of political and cultural developments in the country of origin.

97. My conclusion is that diaspora organisations are very diverse and have the ability to play many roles, but with the assistance of new technologies they are becoming more and more politically influential, both in their home countries and in host societies.

3.4. Role of local authorities in diaspora involvement

98. Local authorities are the first to be responsible for the involvement in local political life of diaspora representatives who are not citizens of the host country.

99. In 1992, the Council of Europe adopted the above-mentioned Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level. This convention not only suggests giving foreign residents the right to vote and stand in local authority elections after five years of lawful and habitual residency preceding the election, but also proposes a series of other measures, including the setting up of consultative bodies which can be used by local authorities to encourage the participation of foreigners in local governance and decision making.

100. So far only eight countries have ratified this convention. I would like to call on all member States of the Council of Europe who have not yet done so to sign and ratify it.

101. The integration of migrant diaspora members in the host countries is impossible without their democratic involvement in elections, at least at the local level. Unfortunately, few European States give priority to this issue. In my opinion, the right to vote at local level is a key precondition of migrant diaspora participation in the political life of the host country.

102. I also consider it important that local authorities in regions with settled diasporas develop strategies and propose forms of co-operation to engage with diasporas, for their mutual benefit.

4. International initiatives regarding migrant diaspora

103. Several international initiatives have been developed by international organisations, such as the IOM, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union with the aim of formulating policy recommendations on the involvement of diaspora in political and economic life.

104. Within the framework of the International Dialogue on Migration, the IOM organised a Diaspora Ministerial Conference in June 2013, involving around 500 participants including more than 55 ministers. In response to fast-growing interest of governments in diaspora issues, this conference took stock of various governmental diaspora policies, programmes, and initiatives, and identified and shared the best and most innovative practices in relation to diasporas. The IOM also implemented several External Voting Programmes in different countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*.²¹

21. *All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United National Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

105. As a result of the joint initiative between the OECD and the French Development Agency statistical research on diasporas was published in 2012.²² This research contains information from 140 countries on migrant populations and diaspora sizes and can be used by policy makers to develop public policy on involvement of diasporas in development.

106. The European Parliament is also interested in diaspora-related policies and organised a seminar in September 2012 on “Diaspora: the Case for an EU Policy”. As a conclusion of this seminar, it was recommended that other European Union institutions be engaged on diaspora as a theme of policy, particularly the European Commission.

107. At the level of the European Commission, diaspora-related issues are mainstreamed into the migration and development dialogues with partner countries in the context of the Prague process, the EU-Africa Migration, Mobility and Employment Partnership, the EU-ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific countries) dialogue and the EU-LAC (Latin American Countries) migration dialogue.

108. It is my opinion, however, that there is a lack of a parliamentary dimension in these initiatives. Parliamentarians have an important role to play in shaping the policies in relation to diasporas in their countries. The Parliamentary Assembly could act as a platform for developing the dialogue between the parliamentarians who are interested in diaspora-related issues. The Assembly could initiate the creation of a parliamentary network on diaspora policies. I am convinced that it would provide added value to the Inter-Ministerial Dialogue on Diaspora launched by the IOM in June 2013. This network could be developed in close collaboration with the IOM and the European Union, using their expertise and resources for the development of broad consultations and sharing experiences between parliamentarians, experts and the diaspora community.

109. The cultural and political rights of the diaspora groups must be recognised and protected by international organisations such as the United Nations, UNESCO and the IOM.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

110. Diasporas have started to play a more prominent role in politics today. The contributions of diasporas in the development of their countries of origin, as well as their active participation in the promotion of an intercultural society in the receiving countries, require the development of adequate governmental strategies and international dialogue.

111. The diasporas’ numerous accomplishments must be seen as success stories of double integration. Success stories which encourage both the countries of origin and destination to view migration not as a problem, but as a common ground, offering tremendous opportunities for dialogue between different countries and cultures.

112. Members of the diaspora need to get organised as distinct communities with specific problems and demands if they want to exert pressure on the political parties in their countries of residence and origin.

113. Diaspora members should not only seek voting rights but also opportunities to present their own candidates in local, regional and parliamentary elections.

114. The diaspora’s political demands are well received at home because they are considered “native demands” rather than intrusions from the outside. The governments of the member States of the Council of Europe can work with diaspora associations as partners for democracy and human rights.

115. While most of the world’s constitutions have been written in the context of native citizenship, loyalty and sovereignty, amendments have to be made to take into account the increasing number of diaspora citizens living across borders and their impact on the promotion of the various social, cultural and political values which characterise the contemporary world.

116. Governments have to play a key role in engaging diasporas in decision-making policies, developing collaboration between governmental institutions and formulating recommendations on drafting diaspora-oriented programmes to ensure economic, social and cultural development.

22. Connecting with Emigrants, A Global Profile of Diasporas, OECD/AFD, October 2012.

117. The media has a major role to play in the promotion of political and cultural diversity both within and across nations. To counter the stereotypes of migrants as victims or criminals, television, newspapers, cinema and electronic media should give them serious opportunities to show themselves as international success stories, an economic and intellectual potential which benefits both their country of residence and their country of origin.

118. In addition to the media, school remains one of the basic institutions for promoting pluralism and diversity at an early age. Students at primary, secondary or graduate levels must be made aware of the scientific, literary and political achievements of diasporas throughout history.

Appendix – Comparative table of diasporas vote in countries of origin

Council of Europe member States	Year	Election type	Voting method
Albania	2013	No external voting	No external voting
Andorra	2013	No external voting	No external voting
Armenia	2013	No external voting	No external voting
Azerbaijan	2000	Legislative	• Personal
Austria	1990	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums	• Postal
Belgium	1998	• Legislative	• Personal, Postal, Proxy
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2001	• Presidential, Legislative, Sub-national	• Personal, Postal
Bulgaria	2007	• Presidential, Legislative, European Parliament elections	• Personal
	1990	• Presidential • Legislative	• Personal
Croatia	2003	• Legislative	• Personal
Cyprus	2011	• Presidential • Legislative	• Personal
Czech Republic	1996	• Legislative	• Personal
Denmark	2009	• Legislative, Referendums, Sub-national	• Personal, Postal
Estonia	2002	• Legislative, Referendums, European Parliament elections	• Personal, Postal, E-voting
Finland	1998	• Presidential, Legislative, Sub-national	• Personal
France	2012	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums, Some seats in Senate	• Personal, Postal, E-voting
Georgia	2011	• Presidential • Legislative	• Personal
Germany	1985	• Legislative	• Postal
Greece	2013	No external voting	No external voting
Hungary	2004	• Legislative, Referendums	• Personal
Iceland	2000	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums, Sub-national	• Personal
Ireland	1923	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums, Sub-national	• Postal
Italy	2002	• Legislative, Referendums	• Postal
Latvia	1995	• Legislative, Referendums	• Personal, Postal
Liechtenstein	1973	• Legislative, Referendums, Sub-national	• Postal
Lithuania	1992	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums	• Personal, Postal
Luxembourg	2005	• Legislative, Referendums, Sub-national, European Parliament elections	• Postal
Malta	2013	No external voting	No external voting
Republic of Moldova	1997	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums	• Personal, Postal
Monaco	2006	• Legislative	• Personal
Montenegro	1998	• Legislative	• Personal
Netherlands	1989	• Legislative	• Proxy, Postal
Norway	2002	• Legislative, Sub-national	• Personal, Postal
Poland	2011	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums, European Parliament elections	• Personal, Postal, Proxy, Fax

Council of Europe member States	Year	Election type	Voting method
Portugal	1997	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums	• Personal, Postal
	1974	• Legislative	• Postal
Romania	2008	• Presidential • Legislative	• Personal
Russian Federation	2003	• Presidential, Legislative, Sub-national, Referendums	• Personal
San Marino	2013	No external voting	No external voting
Serbia	2000	• Legislative	• Personal
Slovak Republic	2004	• Legislative	• Postal
Slovenia	1992	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums	• Personal, Postal
Spain	2011	• Legislative, Referendums	• Postal
Sweden	2005	• Legislative, Referendums	• Personal, Postal, Proxy
Switzerland	2011	• Legislative, Sub-national, Referendums	• Personal, Postal, E-voting
"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	2006	• Presidential, Legislative	• Personal
Turkey	2012	No external voting	No external voting
Ukraine	1999	• Presidential, Legislative, Referendums	• Personal
United Kingdom	2011	• Legislative, Referendums	• Postal, Proxy

Source: Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Database: Voting from abroad (updated 6 December 2013)