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WORKING DOCUMENT

on A Common Agenda for Integration
Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals
in the European Union

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

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I. Overview

The integration of immigrants must rise to the top of the European Union's agenda. This report is animated by the conviction that integration is an issue tantamount in importance to the successful enlargement of the EU. In the face of such a challenge, the Union's commitment has been, at best, neglectful. Rather than incorporating immigrants effectively into schools, workplaces, and political systems, European societies are in many respects slipping into a state of "disintegration."

The report will offer the Parliament's views on how progress can best be made on integration. The recommendations will focus on four areas:

- Accelerating, deepening, and improving the engagement of EU institutions;
- the urgent need for clear-headed, decisive political leadership;
- overcoming conceptual and practical challenges in policymaking; and
- promoting best practices in key integration fields, as well as the concept of civic citizenship.

II. EU Engagement in Immigrant Integration Is Woefully Weak

The number of foreign-born in the EU is estimated at 40 million; their children total millions more. This growing population—spread across most Member States and concentrated in urban areas—is extraordinarily diverse. Yet the problems these residents confront are disquietingly similar. Their participation rate in the labor force is well below average, while their success rate in school lags dangerously behind. They face sharp discrimination in their dealings with both public and private institutions. Politically, they are woefully under-represented at all levels of government.

Yet in trying to overcome this integration challenge—the failure of which could undermine the EU socially, economically, and politically—the Union has committed precious few resources.

We might think of these 40 million immigrants as the EU's 26th Member State (and its seventh largest). We could then ask: How do our efforts to integrate this population compare to the commitments we make to integrate accession countries? Hundreds of Commission civil servants spend years working with accession states, sharing the Union's best practices and bringing laws, administrative practices, and performance into line with EU norms. Billions are spent to level the social and economic playing fields.

By contrast, the EU has just one senior full-time civil servant dedicated explicitly to immigrant integration, and has spent a total of approximately €15 million since 1999 on programs specifically earmarked for the integration of legal immigrants. Put another way, over the past six years, the EU has spent a total €0.5 per legal immigrant on dedicated integration programs.

The lack of resources committed to integration is not just financial but intellectual as well. There is a scarcity of good ideas for bridging the gaps between immigrants and our societies. We need to scour the Union and the world for practices that can dramatically increase our

success rate with immigrant integration. And we must multiply the means for effectively disseminating such ideas.

III. The Rationale for EU Involvement in Integration

For too long, the Union and its institutions have been paralyzed by the widely circulated idea that “integration is local.” While there is practical wisdom in this aphorism, it has led other levels of government and EU institutions to believe their responsibilities for immigrant integration are far fewer than they actually are.

The implementation of integration initiatives is indeed local. A neighborhood’s schools, unions, businesses, places of worship, and other institutions do the hard work of bringing newcomers and natives together in ways that build communities and improve lives. But integration is global in its implications—especially when it fails.

When a Member State fails to devise and implement successful integration policies, it can have wide-ranging adverse consequences on other Member States and on the EU’s social and economic foundations as a whole. To cite just a few examples:

- The underemployment of immigrants weakens not only individual economies, but that of the entire Union—the Lisbon agenda simply will not be fulfilled unless full use is made of immigrant skills;
- high- and low-skilled workers that our economies need, seeing how inhospitable Europe can be to them, are driven into the underground economy or into the arms of our economic competitors;
- the absence of effective integration policies leads to negative perceptions of immigrants, and consequently to defensive immigration policies;
- fear among citizens subverts respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities;
- in its more extreme forms, alienation can breed radicalization that threatens our collective security;
- un-integrated immigrants can undermine the Union’s expansion; for instance, current polling data points to profound skepticism about Turkey’s EU membership, a tendency that surely would be mitigated by the fuller acceptance of immigrants—and especially those of Muslim origin.

Thus, while local, regional, and national authorities should determine the precise integration measures implemented, it is clearly in the Union’s interest that Member States pursue effective integration strategies whose outcomes advance the Union’s common interests. It is in monitoring these outcomes where EU institutions can and must become far more active and—particularly—effective.

This monitoring should compare the integration performance of Member States, while addressing questions such as: Are children of immigrants as successful in school as their native counterparts? Is access to the labor market, and opportunities for advancement within companies, equal for all workers? Are the skills of immigrants being efficiently recognized and employed? How long do newcomers take to acquire fluency in the local language?

Diligent monitoring and incisive analysis of integration efforts will allow for the fast adoption of promising integration techniques. Why, for instance, have some Member States successfully integrated immigrant children into their educational systems, while others falter? In one large Member State, just 18 percent of immigrant children enter the highest secondary educational track, versus 47 percent of natives. To redress such disparities, we must know they exist—and why. Monitoring also creates a salutary “competitive” environment that spurs Member States to improve their performance.

If failure of integration is the father of countless problems, success will strengthen the EU in critical ways: Our common achievements in integration will fortify the Union’s economy in the face of global competition; it will attract the workers and entrepreneurs our economies need, as well as the scientists and students who are the bedrock of our ability to innovate; our cities will be safer, our communities stronger; and the Union’s international clout will grow, as it proves capable of bridging cultural and religious divides.

IV. Past and Future Action by the Commission, Council & Parliament

Previous EU Presidencies, together with the European Commission, have done admirable work in advancing integration policy. Especially notable were the Tampere Agenda; the Thessaloniki Conclusions; the directives on family reunification and long-term residents; and the Dutch Presidency’s Common Basic Principles on Integration¹). Meanwhile, in 2003 the Commission produced a communication on immigration, integration, and employment² that contained thoughtful analysis and ideas for action; more recently it published a useful Handbook on Integration, as well as Integration Guidelines.

In reality, however, the EU’s collective efforts have been notably inadequate at the level of implementation—even in the very limited area in which the Commission has authority to act. Two examples underscore this point: The European Migration Observatory, heralded with fanfare in 2003, has never been created. And the inaugural edition of the *Annual Report on Migration and Integration*—which the European Council tasked the Commission with producing every year—came out on time in June 2004³ but, as of January 2006, the second edition has yet to appear.

It is worth pausing on this latter point: This publication—which should be the single-most critical tool for monitoring the success of Member State integration efforts—serves to highlight another weakness in the Union’s current approach to integration: Its exclusive reliance for data on bureaucratic channels of Member States. Especially considering that two of the Union’s most important roles in this field include monitoring integration and disseminating promising practices, it cannot rely on governments alone to monitor and evaluate themselves. The quality of such evaluations is directly correlated with the independence of the evaluators; it is also profoundly contingent on the ability to access, in one way or another, accurate data.

In 2006 and beyond, the European Commission and other European institutions will have an exceptional series of opportunities to influence immigrant integration. These must be seized

¹ Council Document 14615/04

² COM(2003)336

³ COM(2004)508

and leveraged for optimal effect.

Perhaps the most significant is the newly conceived European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals. Although the Commission requested €1.7 billion, insufficient details were offered on how the funds will be used. This report will aim to provide guidance on how best to use funds allocated for integration initiatives in 2007-13.

Also crucial is the Commission's intent, as outlined in its just-released "Policy Plan on Legal Migration," to draft a general framework directive on legal migration, as well as directives to enhance the Union's ability to attract high-skilled immigrants, seasonal workers, and trainees. This plan is a major step in recognizing that immigration and integration go hand in hand—and that one cannot succeed without the other. The Commission's plan must be fleshed out far more clearly, and must recognize that the integration needs of various categories of immigrants vary widely.

Meanwhile, the Commission has also indicated that it intends to create a prototype website to disseminate best practices on integration. While such a website is important, the Commission's efforts to identify, analyze, and promote best practices must go far beyond this—and must do so urgently in all critical fields (such as language training, housing, education, media, intercultural dialogue, etc.).

Immense scope for improvement also exists in reforming how the Commission manages immigrant integration. For too long, talk of "mainstreaming migration" and nurturing broad cooperation amongst DG's has not led to true organizational change. While DG Justice and DG Employment have done admirable work on integration, other DG's, notably Education, Health, and Enterprise, must also engage intensely on the issue—and coordinate their work effectively.

In parallel, no serious integration policy can be developed absent the active participation of migrants themselves. To this end, there is great potential in the creation of an annual European Integration Forum, bringing together migrants from all 25 Member States, as well as EU citizens who reside outside their country of birth. Many EU countries have been net "exporters" of migrants for decades; the experiences of these emigrants (which often differ only slightly from those of third-country migrants and their descendants living in our midst) should enlighten our integration policies.

Last but not least, it is clear that the ultimate expedient for integration is a clear path to citizenship. While citizenship rights fall fully within the sovereign domain of Member States, the concept of "civic citizenship" championed by the Commission—a robust package of rights and responsibilities that could serve as a precursor to citizenship, including the rights of long-term residents to vote in local elections and participate in the life of political parties—is a promising one that should be addressed by the European Parliament.