

## Integration Policy Conference Conclusions of the Presidency, 11 November 2004

1. The ministers responsible for integration came together from 9-11 November 2004 in Groningen, The Netherlands. In so doing, they emphasised the political urgency of an effective response to integration challenges at the local, regional, national, and international levels and that these efforts can be strengthened by co-ordinated action among EU Member States.
2. The conference opened with a special discussion on the subject of the preceding week's events in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> Ministers expressed solidarity with the Dutch government and the population of the Netherlands, and acknowledged that the concerns arising from and the impact of the situation cross EU borders.
3. This conference was convened with three primary goals:
  - a. First, to send a strong political signal that successful integration is vital to the growth, stability and cohesion of the individual Member States and of the European Union. The ministers present<sup>2</sup> wish to underline the importance of their coming together for the first time and lend their support to on-going work in this area.
  - b. Second, to start a political discussion on integration, focusing both on challenges and practical solutions. The ministers recognise that Member States encounter difficulties in integrating immigrants and their descendants. Such difficulties, if left unattended, can affect adversely key national and European priorities, such as equality of opportunity and social cohesion. Ministers thus take the first steps towards a shared vision on integration, creating the means to better learn from each other's experiences to achieve progress in this area.
  - c. Third, to start the process of giving practical relevance to a shared European vision via an exchange of best practices. This shared vision is embodied in the Common Basic Principles on integration, called for by the European Council in Thessaloniki in June 2003<sup>3</sup> and repeated in the "The Hague Programme; strengthening freedom, security and justice in the European Union". A proposal for Common Basic Principles has been presented by the Presidency for approval by the Member States. The "The Hague Programme" also supports a structural exchange of ideas on integration at the EU level.
4. The presidency and the ministers responsible for integration acknowledged the work of the European Commission, particularly with regard to the Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment<sup>4</sup>, the First Annual Report on Immigration

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<sup>1</sup> The murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh on 5 November 2004, and the arrest, close to the scene, of a Dutchman of Moroccan descent with apparent links to radical Muslim groups, had given rise to various acts of violence, and anti-terrorist actions.

<sup>2</sup> Participants included the ministers responsible for integration in the Member States, applicant countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Turkey), Norway and Iceland, the European institutions and the Council of Europe.

<sup>3</sup> This process started with the European Council in Tampere in 1999 with the establishment of a link between integration and immigration, and extended by the European Council to the Lisbon Strategy, which addressed the economic need for successfully integrated migrants and newcomers.

<sup>4</sup> COM (2003)336 final

and Integration<sup>5</sup>, and its involvement with the Handbook on Integration, prepared in cooperation with the Member States via the National Contact Points.

5. The ministers congratulated the Presidency for its efforts in developing the Common Basic Principles on Integration. These common basic principles will serve as the foundation of a Union-wide effort to improve and expand integration initiatives. Member States thereby will share a general framework for integration that reflects both the values of the European Union and the fact that the success of each Member State in implementing a qualitative, successful integration policy benefits all Member States. Key points highlighted by the ministers included that integration must be a two-way process that fully involves both immigrants and the host society; the fundamental importance of language and civics education; the central role of women in the integration process; and the indispensable role of media and especially NGOs in making a success of integration policies.
6. In line with the Hague Programme calling for a structural exchange of information and for strengthened coordination, the ministers responsible for integration urge the Council, the Member States, and the Commission to pursue coordinated and effective working relations between those responsible for integration policies at the local, regional, national and European levels. The following issues could be addressed: structured and systematic co-ordination within the Commission on initiatives addressed towards third country nationals; assisting Member States in their efforts to strengthen vertical<sup>6</sup> and horizontal<sup>7</sup> networks for the exchange of information and co-ordination of initiatives regarding integration; involving all relevant stakeholders in the integration process; an examination of all financial means available for integration-related activities within the European institutions.<sup>8</sup>
7. This conference can be seen as the first phase in establishing the structural exchange called for in the Hague Programme. Hence, the ministers responsible for integration invite the European Commission, in close co-operation with the National Contact Points, to establish a public-private partnership to create and maintain an integration website to pursue the following goals: create an inventory of the good practices collected for the purposes of this conference and for the Handbook on Integration<sup>9</sup>; encourage further exchange of good practices throughout the EU and beyond by providing a widely accessible forum for this purpose; assess continuously the efficacy of these practices and their transferability to different contexts. This website should be sufficiently funded over the long term and ensure that it offers a genuine and valuable service to governments and civil society throughout the European Union.
8. In sharing practical solutions to integration challenges and in taking a first step towards greater focus on policy on introductory programmes and on youth, the ministers put forward the conclusions listed below.

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5 COM(2004) 508 final

6 Local, regional and national governments, European institutions and civil society

7 Within national governments and within the European institutions

<sup>8</sup> Ministers agreed that the highest priority in the financial area should be the optimal use of current funds. There was discussion about, but no agreement on, increasing funding for integration, for example, through the creation of a European Fund for Integration. Some ministers expressed the belief that if the Member States were to transfer responsibilities for integration to the EU level, there would be a need for adequate Union level funding.

<sup>9</sup> This inventory could be extended to include evaluations of and best practices extracted from other programmes, including (but not restricted to) those supported by European Union funding, e.g. the European Refugee Fund, the European Social Fund, and the INTI fund;

### *Introductory programmes*

- a. Introductory programmes are an essential first step in an integration trajectory that is dynamic and based on mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States. Information provision is essential, both for the newcomer and for the host society. Newcomers must understand unambiguously *what* is expected of them upon entry and the host society must commit to the elimination of obstacles to full participation. Both the newcomer and the host society, however, must understand *why* these measures are necessary. Introductory programmes should start as soon as possible and, if the Member States so choose, in the country of origin.
- b. Introductory programmes should be directed towards economic and social self-sufficiency and the promotion of shared citizenship – a focus on ties that bind us and on solid respect for difference. The needs and concerns of both the newcomer and of the host society must be addressed in attempts to foster shared citizenship in diverse societies. Shared citizenship is rooted in the knowledge and practice of liberal democratic values and requires active involvement in and engagement with society.
- c. Local government, civic society, community leaders, and the private sector must all be involved in the process of creating a sense of shared citizenship by concentrating on public education to dispel myths on all sides, and on solutions that empower and strengthen the roles that different groups can play in society.
- d. It is essential that newcomers are integrated as quickly as possible into the labour market. The business sector has an important role to play in emphasising the importance of labour market participation, increasing opportunities for entry<sup>10</sup> and promotion for newcomers and minorities, and in making known the contributions of these employees to the economy.

### *Youth from a minority/migrant background ( to be amended if necessary after the workshop discussions)*

- e. Many youth with a migrant/minority background are well integrated and on the path to social and economic mobility. However, an increasing proportion of youth with a migrant/minority background feels distanced from the host society, which can breed alienation and tensions within society.
- f. The ministers responsible for integration recognise that measures for this group may differ from those for the newly arrived and should be embedded in general measures to promote equality of opportunity in education and in the work place, while protecting the fundamental freedoms of youth.
- g. Broad based dialogue is essential in confronting the frustration that often lead to social tension and distancing. Barriers to integration (e.g. discrimination), resistance within communities to change (e.g. in upholding negative cultural practices), and engagement with the host society must be prominent on the policy agenda. This dialogue should focus on openness and a commitment to mutual respect, while promoting motivation for change from within the community itself.
- h. Parents can and should be expected to be informed about and engaged in the educational development and social interactions of their children, and to support a focus on shared citizenship and a commitment to basic fundamental freedoms. Interference, even by parents, in the basic freedoms of their children (e.g. through

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<sup>10</sup> For example, by supporting learning in context programmes, which can accelerate the language learning process and reinforce the expectation of (and provide immediate opportunities for) active participation and self-sufficiency.

forced marriage) should be the subject of public education and preventative efforts.<sup>11</sup> Parents, the surrounding community, and society at large must be involved in attempts to ensure the positive development of youth from a migrant/minority background.

- i. Mentors can make a difference as good role models and providing youth with information about educational and employment related opportunities, and in providing a bridge between the home culture and that of the community at large. However, these individual-level efforts must be accompanied by proactive structural initiatives to increase access to educational and employment-related opportunities for youth from a minority/migrant background.

9. The ministers responsible for integration recognise the value of this exchange of ideas and welcome the initiative of the Dutch Presidency.

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<sup>11</sup> In this regard, the ministers welcome the Dutch Presidency's conclusions of the conference entitled "Diversity and Participation: the gender perspective" which called for the elimination of dangerous cultural practices such as genital mutilation, honor killings, and forced marriages.