Common agenda for integration and framework for the integration of third-country nationals in the Union

2006/2056(INI) - 01/09/2005 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE : to propose a common agenda for the integration third-country nationals in the EU.

CONTENT : this Communication is the Commission's first response to the invitation of the European Council to establish a coherent European framework for integration. The cornerstones of such a framework are proposals for concrete measures to put the 11 common basic principles into practice, together with a series of supportive EU mechanisms, including the preparatory actions (INTI) and the proposed European Fund for Integration (see **CNS/2005/0048**). Taking into account existing EU policy frameworks, the Communication provides new suggestions for action both at EU and national level. Member States are encouraged to strengthen their efforts with a perspective to developing comprehensive national integration strategies, while new ways of ensuring consistency between actions taken at EU and national level are being proposed.

The actions suggested at national level are given as possible guidelines designed to help in the conception of national policies and programmes. They are also actions which can be supported under the proposals which the Commission has made for the European Fund for Integration to succeed INTI. The actions proposed at European level extend and develop activities which have shown their usefulness over recent years, in particular the promotion and support of networking amongst practitioners, the transfer of good practice and the exchange of information.

The main integration methods proposed by the Commission can be summarised as follows :

1) **integration of immigrants in the labour market** : the effective and responsible integration of immigrants in the labour market constitutes an important contribution to reaching the Lisbon targets. The Commission stimulates and supports Member States' efforts in employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, stressing the gender perspective to fully utilise the potential of immigrant women in the labour market. The new Integrated Guidelines for Jobs and Growth call on Member States to take action to increase the employment of immigrants;

2) **the promotion of fundamental rights, non discrimination and equal opportunities** : EU legislation provides a strong framework of anti-discrimination legislation. In its Communication on a framework strategy for non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all, the Commission stresses the need to reinforce efforts to promote equal opportunities for all in order to tackle the structural barriers faced by migrants, ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups. The proposed European Year of Equal Opportunities for All in 2007 and the envisaged European Year of Inter-cultural Dialogue in 2008 will be major awareness-raising initiatives contributing to these objectives;

3) **integration measures need adequate financial resources** : the EU supports Member States' integration policies through a number of financial instruments. The Preparatory Actions for integration of third-country nationals (INTI) have been important in promoting activities at local level, strengthening networks and the exchange of information and good practices between Member States, regional and local authorities and other stakeholders. They have attracted great interest but lacked sufficient resources to match the vast needs in this area. Under the financial

perspectives 2007-2013, the Commission has proposed new solidarity instruments, among them a European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals, based on the CBPs. The objectives of the Fund are complementary to the European Social Fund (ESF), which builds on the experiences of the Community Initiative EQUAL in supporting innovative approaches to the prevention of labour market discrimination of migrants. The Commission's proposal for the ESF period 2007-2013 includes a specific focus on reinforcing the social inclusion of people at a disadvantage. The European Regional Development Fund also supports certain integration measures.

In addition, the communication also refers to five ongoing processes and initiatives which should together form the common European framework for integration:

- National Contact Points on Integration : NCPs will continue to play an important role in monitoring progress across policy fields and in ensuring that efforts at national and EU level are mutually reinforcing;

- Handbook on Integration : the Handbook, addressed to policy-makers and practitioners at local, regional, national and EU level, was welcomed by stakeholders. The second edition, planned for 2006, will focus on housing and urban issues, access to health and social services, integration in the labour market, mainstreaming and integration infrastructure and will incorporate the Common Basic Principles (CBPs) firmly into the analysis;

- Integration website : The Hague Programme called explicitly for the development of a widely accessible Internet website. As a first phase, the Commission will launch a tender for a web portal for European experiences on immigrant integration;

- Involving stakeholders : a comprehensive approach involving stakeholders at all levels is essential for the success of integration policies. For this purpose, the Commission would set up a European Integration Forum;

- Annual Report on Migration and Integration : the Commission's Annual Report will be an important instrument to monitor the further development of integration policies in the European Union.

CONCLUSIONS : the Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union put forward by this Communication represents a major commitment and demonstrates that the Commission is giving integration a high place on its policy agenda. A wide range of existing EU policies and financial instruments can help to support the efforts of national authorities and civil society. The challenge of the future will be to promote concerted efforts by all relevant stakeholders in order to maximise the impact and effectiveness of these instruments. The Member States, together with the Commission, should take the necessary steps to develop the Common Agenda for Integration in a forward-looking and focused manner. The Ministers in charge of integration, in close co-operation with the Commission, should hold once a year a political debate on the integration of third-country nationals in the EU and assess the need for further action. The Commission also hopes that the other Institutions and stakeholders will join efforts to achieve the successful integration of third-country nationals into our societies.