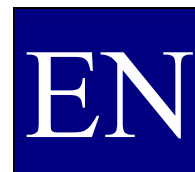




COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on the European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals

*3135th JUSTICE and HOME AFFAIRS Council meeting
Brussels, 13 and 14 December 2011*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Recalling the specific legal basis for integration in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 79.4 TFEU), which enables measures to be established at the European level to provide incentives and support for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States;

Recalling the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals for the period of 2007-2013 established as part of the General Programme "Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows" by Council Decision 2007/435/EC of 25 June 2007, as a highly important tool supporting the development and implementation of national integration strategies for third-country nationals;

Recalling the Stockholm Programme, approved by the European Council on 10 and 11 December 2009, which states that the successful integration of legally residing third-country nationals remains the key to maximising the benefits of immigration and defines strategic guidelines in this field, and that the objective of granting comparable rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all is at the core of the European cooperation in integration;

P R E S S

Recalling the continuing relevance of the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union adopted by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on 19 November 2004, in which the Member States agreed upon shared goals on integration;

Noting the completion of the Common Agenda for Integration presented by the Commission on 1 September 2005 in order to implement the Common Basic Principles and the related Conclusions adopted by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on 1 December 2005;

Taking into account the Commission Communication of 3 March 2010 entitled "EUROPE 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" that highlights the need to design a new agenda for migrants' integration to enable them to take full advantage of their potential;

Taking note of the Commission Communication of 20 July 2011 entitled "European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals" which highlights current integration challenges in the European Union and suggests areas for future action;

Recognising that, for some Member States and depending on their specific needs, migration can, when addressing the current demographic challenges faced by the European Union (e.g. ageing population, declining workforce and labour shortages) be one of the aspects to be considered. Successful integration policies can help to make full use of the potential of migration;

Noting that some migrants constitute potentially vulnerable social groups that can be particularly affected by the effects of the economic and financial crisis, which can lead to integration challenges and problems with social cohesion;

Reaffirming that these Conclusions are without prejudice to the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework;

Recognising that integration is a long-term process that could also benefit from a wider exchange of information regarding social inclusion measures;

CONSIDER that the implementation of the actions proposed by the Commission should be, where appropriate, guided by the following key principles:

1. Developing and implementing integration policies falls within the competence and responsibility of the Member States. The introduction of a specific legal basis for integration in the Treaty constitutes a solid basis to establish measures at the EU level to provide further incentives and support for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories.
2. Integration policies should, to the extent possible, be formulated and implemented with an active involvement of local and regional authorities and stakeholders ensuring appropriate coordination between the different actors involved. The support of the European Union and national governments to local initiatives and local NGOs, inter alia by means of financial assistance, should be provided where appropriate. Best practices in this respect could be identified and exchanged.
3. Managing integration is a shared responsibility requiring engagement from both the receiving society and migrants. Both parties need to be aware of their rights and obligations which have to be well-balanced and create favourable conditions for integration. On the one hand, migrants need to show willingness and responsibility for their own integration process, and make efforts in this context, including acquiring the language and respecting the laws and values of the receiving society. On the other hand, the receiving society has the responsibility to empower immigrants by providing access to the most elementary aspects of social, economic and cultural life.
4. Integration policies should be based on the needs of Member States and of individual migrants rather than specific reasons for migration, taking into consideration the situation of both men and women. Particular attention should be paid to the specific needs of newly arrived third-country nationals and vulnerable groups of migrants, which can vary from one Member State to another and can be based on considerations such as socio-economic status, age, gender or disability.
5. Integration policies should be supported by measures to combat discrimination and social exclusion, promote intercultural dialogue while avoiding building parallel communities and encourage diversity in receiving societies in order to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sense of belonging. Active participation of migrants in receiving societies, as stated in the Common Basic Principles, is important for their successful integration.
6. Financial support from the EU should be ensured in the form of tailored financial instruments.

RECOGNISE that the European Commission should continue to play a role in bringing together the relevant actors ensuring and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practices;

PROPOSE the following measures and invite the Commission with the support of the Member States to take appropriate steps in order to ensure their implementation:

1. Develop a non-binding coordination mechanism in order to improve the structures and tools for European knowledge exchange mentioned in the Stockholm Programme by reinforcing the already existing structures such as the network of National Contact Points on Integration and exploring possible further measures to enhance coordination and mutual learning.
2. In this respect, and in order to foster the European learning process, consider further development of a monitoring system including appropriate data collection and analysis to monitor the degree of integration (outcomes of policies) based on agreed common indicators, recognising the principle of subsidiarity. During this process any unnecessary burden on Member States should be avoided. European comparative analysis should take into account the specificities of each Member State and the particular situation of different groups of migrants including the gender perspective. Duplication of efforts in data collection should be avoided.
3. Further develop a flexible tool-box, especially in the form of "European modules", to support national and local policies and facilitate the dissemination and effective implementation of the modules inter alia by non-binding guidelines on the matter.
4. Make further efforts to organise the cooperation on integration as a continuous learning process of Member States based on their active involvement and contributions. In this context, explore ways of improving the cooperation of the National Contact Points on Integration as far as specific topics are concerned. The National Contact Points on Integration should concentrate on the exchange of best practice as well as on horizontal aspects of integration. In addition, maintain the good practice of organising relevant events, which should be focused on specific topics related to the integration of third-country nationals in the European Union.
5. Further explore with Member States the possibilities for cooperation with the countries of origin in supporting the integration process in Member States paying particular attention to the roles, responsibilities, rights and obligations of all the stakeholders involved. In addition, consider how a successful integration policy can have a positive impact on the development of countries of origin.

6. Ensure proper financing of integration measures at the European level in the next financial framework, considering the possibilities of:
- simplifying the use of funds;
 - reducing the administrative burden both for the applicants and the administrative authorities;
 - greater flexibility regarding the target group;
 - developing a needs-based approach taking into account the specific situation in a particular Member State;
 - better involvement of the local and regional level;
 - a higher degree of coordinated programming (complementarity) between the EU funds;
 - supporting the implementation of the European modules for integration and measuring results based on the common indicators of integration.
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Draft Statement to the Council minutes by the Austrian, German and the Netherlands delegations

In the view of Austrian, German and the Netherlands delegations, the European exchange of information on integration should not only concentrate on our experience with regard to third-country nationals, but should comprise also our experience concerning the social inclusion of all people with a migratory background.

The Austrian, German and the Netherlands delegations are of the view that, in general, the promotion of integration does not depend on origin or nationality, but on the individual need for integration. In many cases, immigrants from the Member States and own nationals with an immigrant background face the same integration challenges as immigrants from third countries. Practical experience in Austria, Germany and the Netherlands, for example, has shown that a growing number of EU citizens are taking advantage of language courses. Limiting European exchange to third-country nationals therefore does not seem to reflect actual practice.

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