



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**SOC/281**  
**EU-level promotion of**  
**policies to integrate third-**  
**country nationals**

Brussels, 9 July 2008

**OPINION**

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

**Elements for the structure, organisation and functioning of a platform for the greater involvement of civil society in the EU-level promotion of policies for the integration of third-country nationals**

(Exploratory opinion)

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In a letter dated 24 July 2007, Ms Margot Wallström and Mr Franco Frattini, Vice-Presidents of the European Commission, asked the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an exploratory opinion on the

*Elements for the structure, organisation and functioning of a platform for the greater involvement of civil society in the EU-level promotion of policies for the integration of third-country nationals*  
(Exploratory opinion).

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 10 June 2008. The rapporteur was Mr Pariza Castaños.

At its 446th plenary session, held on 9 and 10 July 2008 (meeting of 9 July), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 136 votes to four, with seven abstentions.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The European Commission, in the person of the Vice-Presidents Franco Frattini and Margot Wallström, asked the EESC to draw up an exploratory opinion on the "*elements for the structure, organisation and functioning of a platform for the greater involvement of civil society in the EU-level promotion of policies for the integration of third-country nationals*".
- 1.2 The EESC has drawn up a number of opinions in recent years<sup>1</sup> emphasising that integration is a crucial aspect of European immigration and asylum policies and has worked very actively with the Commission, Parliament and Council to promote these policies.
- 1.3 The Committee has promoted the involvement of civil society organisations in drawing up these opinions because these organisations are key stakeholders in integration policies. As long ago as 2002, the EESC and the European Commission invited Member State social

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<sup>1</sup> EESC opinion of 21.03.2002 on "Immigration, integration and the role of civil society organisations", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 125, 27.5.2002).

EESC opinion of 10/11.12.2003 on the "Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on immigration, integration and employment", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 80, 30.3.2004).

EESC opinion of 13/14.09.2006 on "Immigration in the EU and integration policies: cooperation between regional and local governments and civil society organisations", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 318, 23.12.2006).

partners and civil society organisations to attend a major conference<sup>2</sup>, which gave an initial boost to a common approach to European integration policies: the conference's conclusions proposed drawing up a Community integration programme and establishing a fund to finance the aims agreed on.

## 2. The European Framework for the integration of third-country nationals

- 2.1 In its opinion on "Immigration, Integration and the Role of Civil Society" of 21 March 2002<sup>3</sup>, the EESC highlighted the need to develop clear and effective integration policies as part of an EU framework programme. Although the process of establishing a common framework for integrating immigrants has not been entirely free of problems, the European Union (EU) will, when the Lisbon Treaty is ratified, have better political and legal instruments necessary to implement this framework.
- 2.2 The Hague programme<sup>4</sup>, aimed at strengthening the EU's area of freedom, security and justice, stated that integrating third-country nationals is a key political strategy for consolidating freedom in the EU in the 2005-2009 period<sup>5</sup>.
- 2.3 The European Council stated the need to improve coordination between national integration policies and EU initiatives; this is being done by means of the Common Basic Principles (CBPs), which form a common framework for the integration of immigrants, adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 19 November 2004<sup>6</sup>. This need for coordination was also confirmed by the European Commission in its communication entitled "*The Hague Programme: ten priorities for the next five years*"<sup>7</sup>, which referred to the need to establish a European framework for integration based on the CBPs that guarantees respect for the EU's basic rights and values, and upholds the principle of non-discrimination.

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<sup>2</sup> Conference on "Immigration: The role of civil society in integration", Brussels, 9 and 10 September 2002.

<sup>3</sup> EESC opinion of 21.3.2002 on "Immigration, integration and the role of civil society organisations", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños: (OJ C 125, 27.5.2002).

<sup>4</sup> European Council, "The Hague Programme: strengthening freedom, security and justice in the European Union " (OJ C 53, 3.3.2005, p. 1).

<sup>5</sup> EESC opinion of 15.12.2005 on the "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The Hague Programme: Ten priorities for the next five years — The Partnership for European renewal in the field of Freedom, Security and Justice", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 65,17.3.2006).

<sup>6</sup> Council of the European Union, Session No 2618 of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, Brussels, 19 November 2004, 14615/04.

<sup>7</sup> Commission Communication, The Hague Programme: Ten priorities for the next five years The Partnership for European renewal in the field of Freedom, Security and Justice, COM(2005) 184 final, Brussels, 10.5.2005.

- 2.4 The CBPs provide a coherent approach for the European concept of the integration of third-country nationals, based on the aim of "civic integration", which, as the Committee proposed<sup>8</sup> consists of *"bringing immigrants' rights and duties, as well as access to goods, services and means of civic participation progressively into line with those of the rest of the population, under conditions of equal opportunities and treatment"*. The CBPs represent a two-way process, because integration involves adaptation and responsibility on the part of both immigrants and host communities.
- 2.5 In its communication of 1 September 2005 on "A Common Agenda for Integration: Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union"<sup>9</sup>, the European Commission put forward practical measures aimed at enforcing and strengthening the implementation of CBPs at both the national and EU level. The Commission also acknowledged the need to ensure that all parties concerned are involved in making integration a success and in adopting a global and coherent approach under the EU framework.
- 2.6 To this end, it proposed initiatives, in conjunction with the network of National Contact Points, including an Internet site, producing handbooks, the annual reports on migration and integration, and a **European Integration Forum**.
- 2.7 The conclusions of the June 2007 European Council state that: *"The European Council likewise welcomes the efforts that have been made in order to improve the continued and deepened cooperation at EU level and between Member States in the area of integration and intercultural dialogue. The European Council welcomes, in particular, the Council conclusions of 12 June on the strengthening of integration policies in the EU by promoting unity in diversity. It emphasises the importance of further initiatives to facilitate the exchange of experience on integration policies of the Member States"*<sup>10</sup>.
- 2.8 The EESC shares the holistic approach put forward recently by the European Council, because integration and intercultural dialogue must be key components of the EU's immigration policy.
- 2.9 The complementary and indissoluble link between integration and immigration was acknowledged in the conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 12 and 13 June 2007<sup>11</sup>. Adopting the recommendations made at the informal meeting of ministers responsible for integration in Potsdam on 10 and 11 May, which the EESC attended, the Council

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<sup>8</sup> EESC opinion of 21.3.2002 on "Immigration, integration and the role of civil society organisations", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 125, 27.5.2002).

<sup>9</sup> A Common Agenda for Integration: Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, COM(2005) 389 final, Brussels, 1.9.2005.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/94932.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/94932.pdf), point 20.

<sup>11</sup> Council of the European Union, Session No 2807 of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, 12 and 13 June 2007, 10267/07.

highlighted the need for a political review of the scope of new measures aimed at strengthening the European framework for integration and the Member States' integration policies.

- 2.10 Civil society organisations and the social partners have a particularly important role to play in ensuring the coherence and effectiveness of the social processes of integrating immigrants, in defining policies in the EU and in evaluating these policies. In its opinion on *"Immigration in the EU and integration policies: cooperation between regional and local governments and civil society organisations"* of 13 September 2006<sup>12</sup>, the EESC considered that active cooperation with civil society and the social partners was a key aspect of promoting European integration policies. In particular, the EESC emphasised the importance of the role played by the social partners, human rights organisations, immigrants' organisations, cultural and sports associations, faith communities, neighbourhood associations, educational communities, schools and universities, the media, etc. in the integration processes at the national, regional and local levels. The EESC also highlighted the need to promote the development, consolidation and recognition of these organisations at European level when overhauling the EU's framework for the integration of immigrants.
- 2.11 Establishing reception and integration policies and programmes for immigrants should go hand in hand with the widespread participation and direct involvement of social organisations and immigrant associations. This approach was also confirmed in the Third Annual Report on Migration and Integration, published by the European Commission on 11 September 2007<sup>13</sup>. The Annual Report reiterates the initiative to establish a **European Integration Forum**, in which stakeholders working in the field of integration in the EU can exchange experiences and make recommendations<sup>14</sup>.
- 2.12 Promoting integration policies and exchanging experiences will also be greatly assisted by the adoption of a sound and ambitious financial framework. As part of the programme entitled "Solidarity and management of migration flows 2007-2013", the European Fund for the Integration of Third-country Nationals<sup>15</sup> will help to develop national policies based on the CBPs and produce a new EU policy on the integration of immigrants.
- 2.13 The Reform Treaty adopted in Lisbon on 18 October 2007 (the "Lisbon Treaty") also acknowledged that establishing a common European policy for integrating immigrants is a key policy for the EU. As a consequence of Title V of the Treaty on the Functioning of the Union (TFU), the European Union will for the first time have a legal base (Article 63 a4, the

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<sup>12</sup> EESC opinion of 13/14.9.2006 on "Immigration in the EU and integration policies: cooperation between regional and local governments and civil society organisations", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 318, 23.12.2006).

<sup>13</sup> Commission communication: Third Annual Report on Migration and Integration, COM(2007) 512 final, Brussels, 11.9.2007.

<sup>14</sup> See the communication COM(2007) 512 final, point 3.1.

<sup>15</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/funding/integration/funding\\_integration\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/integration/funding_integration_en.htm).

new Article 79.4) on which to develop common legislative measures to encourage and support the work of the Member States to integrate third-country nationals<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. **EESC proposal to establish the European Integration Forum**

3.1 The EESC considers that the coherence of the EU's policies needs to be improved, given that a number of instruments are already in place, including the Common Agenda for Integration, the European Integration Fund, the National Contact Points on Integration, the Handbooks on Integration, the Annual Reports on Migration and Integration, the website, etc. The Committee considers that it would be useful to revive the debate on the open method of coordination. The European Commission should propose that the Council make use of the open method of coordination on integration, which the Council rejected a few years ago.

3.2 In order to improve the coherence of this policy and its instruments, a **platform for civil society participation** should be put in place. The EESC therefore welcomes and feels honoured by the European Commission's request for an exploratory opinion.

3.3 Bearing in mind other existing platforms (for other EU policies) and the different national experiences, the Committee proposes that the European platform be known as the **European Integration Forum** (the name adopted by the European Commission<sup>17</sup>).

3.4 The Committee considers that the Forum should be set up gradually. Its first meeting should be held in the autumn of 2008 to draw up its work programme and finalise its structure.

### 3.5 **The tasks of the European Integration Forum**

3.5.1 In a number of opinions<sup>18</sup>, the EESC has stated the need for a holistic approach to integration, requiring the involvement of all players concerned, especially the social partners and organised civil society.

3.5.2 In its communication on the Common Agenda for Integration<sup>19</sup> the Commission considers that the Forum's main tasks could be "consultation, exchange of expertise and drawing up recommendations".

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<sup>16</sup> Article 63.a.4: "The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, may establish measures 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".

<sup>17</sup> COM(2005) 389 final.

<sup>18</sup> Opinions of the European Economic and Social Committee of 21.3.2002 on "Immigration, integration and the role of civil society organisations", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 125, 27.5.2002) and of 13 and 14.9.2006 on "Immigration in the EU and integration policies: cooperation between regional and local governments and civil society organisations", rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños (OJ C 318, 23.12.2006).

<sup>19</sup> COM(2005) 389 final.

- 3.5.3 The Committee agrees and considers that these tasks could be fulfilled by drawing up reports (which could include guidelines) on integration policies.
- 3.5.4 The Commission, Parliament and the Council could consult the Forum on European integration policies.
- 3.5.5 The Forum could draw up own-initiative reports for the EU institutions in order to improve the integration of third-country nationals.
- 3.5.6 Exchanging technical know-how and good practice should be one of the Forum's main tasks, to be carried out in cooperation with the network of National Contact Points.
- 3.5.7 The Forum could contribute to the Conferences on the Handbook on Integration and to National Contact Point meetings.
- 3.5.8 The Forum's activities, reports and conclusions will be published on the EESC website and on the Commission's dedicated website for integration, which will enable European citizens and third-country nationals to become involved (a virtual forum).

### 3.6 **Membership of the Forum**

- 3.6.1 The Forum will have a maximum of 100 members and will meet twice a year.
- 3.6.2 The Commission considers that *"Its added value would be to assemble a range of stakeholders active in the area of integration at EU level; [...] for example, EU umbrella organisations having a membership across a number of Member States<sup>20</sup>".* The EESC shares the Commission's view and considers that labour integration with equal treatment is a priority, and it is therefore important that the social partners also have a place in the Forum.
- 3.6.3 It is crucial that the Forum's work adopt a European approach, based on national experiences and practice. The EESC therefore proposes that the Forum's members include representatives of organisations working at both the EU and national levels.
- 3.6.4 One-third of the Forum's members will represent EU organisations which work in the field of immigrant integration, and this could include the social partners.
- 3.6.5 The remaining participants will come from consultative bodies from the Member States (with each Member State sending between one and four representatives). In this way, the forums, platforms, councils and similar institutions that exist in the Member States - especially those involving immigrant organisations - will also be represented in the European Forum. In those

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<sup>20</sup> COM(2005) 389 final.

Member States where no such organisations exist, the economic and social councils (or similar institutions) could have a place in the Forum.

3.6.6 The EESC considers that immigrants' organisations, most of which are organised on national lines and do not have European networks, must be encouraged to become involved in the European Integration Forum; the Member State forums, platforms, councils or ESCs should, therefore, nominate delegates from the most representative immigrants' organisations.

3.7 When nominating participants, organisations should take account of the gender balance.

3.7.1 The Forum could invite observers and experts, in particular from the specialist European agencies, as well as academics and researchers and European local authority networks, to attend its meetings.

3.7.2 In order to promote the broadest possible participation, the European Integration Forum should network with civil society organisations (at the local, regional, national and European levels).

3.7.3 The EESC will take part in the Forum's meetings, as set out in point 3.8; representatives of the Commission, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions could also take part.

### 3.8 **The EESC's commitment**

3.8.1 The Committee will be highly committed to the Forum's activities and to this end will set up a permanent 15-member study group on integration within the SOC Section. Through this permanent group, the Forum will work together with the EESC on drawing up opinions.

3.8.2 The members of the permanent study group will take part in the Forum's plenary meetings.

3.8.3 Bearing in mind the new legal base that is the Lisbon Treaty, the EESC will draw up new opinions containing proposals and political recommendations to encourage and support Member States' action in the field of integration.

### 3.9 **Structure of the Forum**

3.9.1 The EESC proposes that the Forum adopt a very simple structure:

- A president, appointed by the EESC in agreement with the Commission.
- Three vice-presidents appointed by the Forum.
- The president and the three vice-presidents will constitute the Forum's Bureau, which will meet at least four times per year.
- A small secretariat (of 2 people) from the EESC.
- The Forum will meet in the EESC building, where it will be based.
- The Forum's plenary will meet twice a year, when convened by the president.



- For drawing up reports, small study groups could be set up.

### 3.10 **The Forum's Agenda**

- 3.10.1 The Common Basic Principles will provide the roadmap for the Forum's activities and consequently its agenda.
- 3.10.2 The work agenda will be drawn up by the Forum's Bureau, taking account of the agendas of the EU institutions and civil society organisations.
- 3.10.3 The Forum could assess the objectives and programmes of the European Integration Fund, as well as the other instruments provided for under European integration policy.

### 3.11 **Rules of Procedure**

- 3.11.1 The EESC proposes that the European Commission approve the Forum's Rules of Procedure, at the proposal of the EESC.
- 3.11.2 The EESC proposes that the European Commission, at the proposal of the EESC, appoint the Forum's members.

### 3.12 **Financial framework**

- 3.12.1 The Forum should be funded by economic resources provided by the EU institutions.

Brussels, 9 July 2008.

The president  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

The secretary-general  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

Dimitris Dimitriadis

Patrick Venturini

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**N.B.:** Appendices overleaf.

**PREPARATORY MEETING – EUROPEAN INTEGRATION FORUM  
BRUSSELS, 29-30 APRIL 2008**

**REPORT FROM WORKSHOP No 1**

*DRAWN UP BY PASCALE CHARHON, DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN NETWORK AGAINST RACISM (ENAR)*

I would like to take this opportunity to brief you on the discussions and exchanges that took place in workshop No 1. I should like to emphasise that the wealth of contributions helped to demonstrate the importance, as if this were necessary, of the issue of integration and the role of the future European Forum on Integration for national and European civil society.

As requested by the meeting's chairman, Mr Jahier, to whom I offer my thanks, the working sessions and discussions in our workshop fell into two separate parts: one looking at the Forum's role and tasks and the other at its operational structure, including the issues of representation and participation.

I think it would be useful first of all to state that an initial set of contributions focused on questioning and clarifying the issue of the target public to be covered by the Forum's theme-based activities.

Many speakers made the point that groups of migrants or third-country nationals each face different situations, depending on whether they are asylum-seekers or refugees, long-term legal residents, in the process of regularising their situation or residing illegally. What is most important is to acknowledge that the concept of integration applies to different communities and to different legal situations in each Member State. Primarily, however, and recalling the words of one participant, the concept of integration applies above all to human beings involved in different forms of migration. A considerable number of speakers emphasised that the type of support and reception policy provided for migrants is inextricably linked to the issue of migrants' legal status and that any integration policy should be able to meet the needs of all migrants, whatever their status.

**THE ROLE OF THE FORUM: MAKING MIGRANTS' VOICES HEARD**

Where the issue of the Forum's role is concerned, it became clear to many speakers that the European Integration Forum could play a major role in ensuring that the voices and concerns of the people involved in immigration are heard more clearly at the European level. In short, migrants' voices must be heard in European debates.

In this context, more than one reference was made during discussions to the Forum's ability to give appropriate consideration to the daily experience of migrants in light of the dynamics of integration, with regard to their status (whether they are refugees, in the process of regularising their situation or irregular immigrants) and to the administrative and social problems migrants that can encounter on a daily basis when trying to obtain a residence permit, accommodation or employment. These problems

can lead to instability and exclusion, sometimes severe in nature, and should be covered in the Forum's discussions and themes. Reference was also made to the need for coherence between integration policies and policies for social inclusion.

The chairman and other speakers wished, however, to point out that the work of the European Integration Forum, in line with its legal base, would be to focus specifically on the situation of third-country nationals residing legally in EU Member States. The legal situation of refugees is also covered by other European legal instruments.

The issue of immigrants' involvement - whether social or cultural - in public life was mentioned as an important theme for the Forum's work. Enabling migrants to contribute as much as possible to their host societies and making the best use of diversity in the labour market were also suggested as working subjects. The processes of integration into the labour market require experimental programmes that can be funded through financial instruments such as the European Social Fund. These measures can influence national policy. Against this backdrop, the experiments in trans-national project management should feature on the Forum's agenda. The issue of statistics and data collection was raised as another key theme that the Forum should address.

#### **WORKING METHODS: GOOD PRACTICE, RESOURCE CENTRES AND POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN DEBATE ON INTEGRATION**

With regard to its working methods, the Forum has the potential to become a centre of resources for civil society on integration-related issues. It could become a catalyst for exchanging good practice, for sharing knowledge that will enable the Forum's discussions to be innovative and to give genuine added value to the debate on integration at both the European and national levels. The Forum's ability to work together with the EU institutions and to influence policy drafting and development was considered to be a key task. The Forum should play a pro-active role in this area.

The Forum should allow for a process of skills acquisition to take place. It was suggested that the non-profit sector should be given training on how to access European funding and in particular the European Fund for Integration. Reference was made to a framework for discussion; how could agreement be reached on a minimum platform of common concepts and ideas? Speakers referred to the framework provided by the 11 basic common principles for integration that should form the "roadmap" for discussions. The principle of *ownership, empowerment and participation* are processes that the forum should be able to adopt.

#### **STRUCTURE**

Various opinions suggested that the Forum's structure should essentially evolve and that its working methods should remain flexible and be tested and assessed in the medium term. The idea was put forward of models for national NGO councils representing migrants' associations in contact with and consulted by the public authorities; these are working practices that the Forum could adopt. The example was given of Malta, where consultative councils have been set up. Another example is the

Spanish Integration Forum, which brings together representatives of associations, public authorities and businesses. This forum is consulted by the public authorities and delivers own-initiative opinions.

At this stage in the discussion, the meeting chairman and other speakers clarified a number of points.

The purpose of the Forum was not to replace the EU institutions and national contact points in the field of integration. As the European Commission has stated, the Forum is intended to be a platform for exchanging experiences and making recommendations. Its discussions should centre on the situation of migrants and practices in the non-profit sector. It will be a consultative body. It will work in close cooperation with the EU institutions and national contact points for integration-related matters.

The methodology of exchanging good practice is in itself a very important lever for the Forum's work. This process could help to boost and develop a framework for producing a future open method of coordination in the field of integration at the European level. The Forum should be effective and pragmatic and should not be overly bureaucratic, as this would hamper its efficiency.

What are the ambitions and aims for the Forum? The question has not yet been answered, but these ambitions and aims must remain realistic and reasonable.

## **REPRESENTATION**

The meeting chairman stated that at this stage in discussions, the issue of the Forum's structure remained open. The EESC had proposed a structure consisting of 90 members/participants. The methods for appointing these individuals remained to be established. The Forum would have an executive bureau as well as a secretariat. The chairman compared the advantages of an open and extensive structure that was open to as many participants as possible and meeting occasionally, with a more limited structure operating on a permanent basis. These aspects would depend on the budget allocated. A number of participants appeared to support the idea of a structure in which members would be appointed on a permanent basis. This stability would help the Forum to have an impact in the medium term. The Forum should enable all stakeholders representing civil society at the national and the European level to be represented. The issue of selection criteria was discussed, although no clear opinions or consensus were expressed. It was clearly acknowledged, however, that the gender dimension should be taken into due account when considering the criteria for representativeness.

Attention was drawn to the complexity of the European institutions' workings, which would require civil society stakeholders to master the institutions' convoluted procedures and organisational style. Working together with the institutions would require individuals who are up to the task.

What did emerge clearly was that the national and European dimension of migrants' voices should be appropriately represented in the Forum. The issue of the resources needed to help national associations take part in the Forum's activities in line with their size is also a factor that would affect the final selection process.

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**Integration Forum Preparatory Meeting**

**Workshop 2**

29-30 April, European Economic and Social Council

**Rapporteur:** Elizabeth Collett, European Policy Centre

The workshop was held on the afternoon of the 29 April, and comprised a number of national and European civil society representatives, national government and EU officials, as well as several experts.

The workshop was given the task of assessing and offering comments on the issues and main tasks for the European Integration Forum, the role and structure to be adopted, and its membership.

It is clear from the scope of the discussion that a great number of details have yet to be thought through. A number of uncertainties as well as points of disagreement remain. Several of the workshop participants stated the need for further in-depth discussion, particularly within the Member States, as to how the Integration Forum will function.

**Issues**

The workshop began with a discussion of which issues should be covered. Participants emphasised the need to take a broad approach to the agenda of the Integration Forum. This has several dimensions.

First, despite the legal mandate to focus on the integration of legally resident third country nationals, a number of participants emphasised the need to include other migrants, specifically undocumented migrant workers and EU citizens, who also have integration needs.

One participant also noted that many migrants fall into a legal "grey area" through no fault of their own, and should not be penalised for the failure of others, notably employers, to ensure they are living and working legally. Another participant noted the situation of failed asylum seekers and stated that despite 650 000 returns decisions in 2004, only 164 000 were actually returned to their home countries, leaving nearly 500 000 non-nationals in a de facto illegal situation. These migrants should be included in the discussions of the Integration Forum, regardless of the arbitrary distinctions made by the Member States.

Second, the Integration Forum should take a broad conceptual approach, embracing issues related to social inclusion, diversity and anti-discrimination policies which should be taken together.

Third, and linked to the previous point, is the need for policy coherence with respect to the wide range of policies adopted regarding migrants, but also through introducing other issue areas of relevance, such as youth policies and tackling poverty. Participants considered the Common Basic Principles to be a solid basis for organising the work of the Forum.

A number of specific themes were also suggested:

- Ø The role of racism in preventing equality and integration.
- Ø The role of the media in integration.
- Ø The impact of immigration policies on integration.
- Ø The importance of legal frameworks for integration.

While participants were vocal about the need to separate the integration agenda from the counter-terrorism agenda, it was recognised that the Forum would have to discuss this issue, as it is high on the agenda of the EU and Member States. This, in turn, raised the question of how far a civil society forum would be able to set an agenda for discussion rather than follow priorities set within other EU institutions.

### **Role**

Three roles for the Integration Forum were quickly identified: advisor, monitor and advocate.

As advisor, the Forum should not only be able to feed into EU policy development, but also do this at the national level. One participant suggested that the Forum would be a useful resource for consultation for national reporting mechanisms, such as the Multi-Annual Programmes developed by Member States for the Integration Fund, or the National reports submitted as part of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Inclusion and Protection.

As a monitor, the Forum should be capable of following integration policies at both the national and European levels, and offer input as to their relative success. At the national level particularly, there is a role for shadowing the implementation of European legislation by Member States and reporting back to the institutions via the forum. One participant asked whether the Integration Forum would have genuine policing power in fulfilling this function or whether it would just be a "descriptive" exercise. The former would give weight and substance to what would otherwise be a talking shop.

Finally, it was suggested that the Integration Forum should undertake the role of advocate, where necessary, highlighting new issues and areas for reform, and pushing the boundaries of the topics covered by the European Union institutions themselves. It was emphasised that equal opportunities and the international legal framework are central to such advocacy.

## **Tasks**

A number of tasks were identified. Key was dissemination: ensuring that the work of the Forum is communicated to as many stakeholders as possible. Horizontally, the Forum needs formal mechanisms for reporting to other EU institutions, such as the Commission, Council and Parliament. Vertically, the designers of the Forum should consider how the issues being discussed can be effectively disseminated beyond the 90 members of the meeting itself.

There is also a role for the Integration Forum to disseminate its findings and deliberations to the general public, in an effort to change opinions and perceptions of migrants and their integration into European society.

Finally, the group considered the task of the forum in involving other partners from experts on integration – such as the National Contact Points – to similar forums and agencies responsible for overlapping policy areas. How can the Forum link to other work being done both at national and European level?

## **Structure**

With respect to structure, little was said concerning the proposed structure of President and Secretariat. The Chair noted that this was due in part to the fact that many participants had only received copies of the EESC's Revised Preliminary Hearing a few hours before, and thus had not had time to reflect upon its contents. It was suggested that in future such documents be circulated more widely, and some days before any such meeting. However, a number of issues were raised related to the functioning of the Forum.

First, participants asked how it would link to other agencies and other levels of governance. More than one NCPI representative noted that links could be formed with the National Contact Points to supplement their work, while others proposed an informal Open Method of Coordination. Should the NCPs become members of the Forum to strengthen this connection?

The vertical link between local, national and European civil society actors was highlighted. One participant noted that integration was increasingly localised, with regions taking on more responsibility. Given this, is a centralised European Integration Forum the most appropriate method of listening to civil society?

Second, some thought was given to how the Forum would ensure work continued from one meeting to the next. It is essential that the Forum's work should not be limited to two plenary meetings. Instead, working and study groups can ensure that the findings from one meeting are developed for the next, and topics for discussion prepared and communicated beforehand. Here it was suggested that national forums – where they exist – could prepare for each forum meeting so that a variety of views would be put forward.

A number of participants highlighted the examples offered by existing national integration forums, both positive and negative. In Spain for example, the National Integration Forum works with members from both the national and the regional level, monitors policy developments and is involved in the development of national strategic plans for integration. In Portugal, the Consultative Council for Immigration Issues participates in government meetings on a regular basis.

On the other hand, one participant noted that the Netherlands has a number of consultative structures, but that none of these are ever listened to, while in Greece, civil society is considered too weakly institutionalised to be capable of consultation. Instead, a government-funded research institute acts as interlocutor. The range and relative success of different national processes suggests that some countries will be better equipped to participate in a European Forum than others.

It is clear that the designers of the European Integration Forum can learn from these experiences, and should pay close attention.

### **Membership**

The key questions regarding membership were representativeness, selection, numbers and capacity.

It was asked how the Forum can ensure an adequate number of migrants are directly represented, as well as maintain a gender balance. Some hard measures were suggested, such as quotas, as well as soft measures, such as guidelines and encouraging Member States to send a balanced delegation.

Territorial representativeness was highlighted, with one participant asking whether a single organisation would be capable of representing civil society across a whole Member State, particularly given the local/sectoral nature of many organisations. Are representatives putting forward their own views or attempting to put forward the collective view of their Member State? Separately, should countries with lower levels of integration send fewer representatives?

The selection process, and particularly the issue of who would be responsible for selection was raised. The draft proposal leaves Member States in charge, should national forums not be available, and some participants questioned whether this was the most appropriate method: some civil society representatives did not trust their government to pick fairly.

A number of participants put forward ideas for selecting representatives, such as creating a pool of six representatives who would rotate, or four nominations from different sectors (such as NGO, social partner, NCP etc.). It was highlighted that some of these options would result in a huge Forum which would be unmanageable and cost much more than the funding available.

One participant noted that the one third/two thirds split between EU and national representatives results in too much EU representation. However, platform organisations based in Brussels highlighted the possibility of calling on a member organisation to represent them, rather than participating themselves.



Finally, the capacity of many civil society actors to participate and follow policy developments at the European level was questioned. While a Forum is a nice idea, one participant stressed the need many organisations have for core funding. Another participant noted that many civil society groups are insufficiently organised professionally.

A number of participants recommended the drafting of guidelines for selection and criteria for membership to ensure all participants have critical capacity and that representation across Member States is more equal.

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