



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/411
Cooperation in
integrating immigrants

Brussels, 13 July 2011

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on

Cooperation between civil society organisations and local and regional authorities in integrating immigrants

(Additional opinion)

Rapporteur: **Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños**

On 20 January 2011, the European Economic and Social Committee decided, under Rule 29A of the implementing provisions, to draw up an additional opinion on

Cooperation between civil society organisations and local and regional authorities in integrating immigrants.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 27 June 2011.

At its 473rd plenary session, held on 13 and 14 July 2011 (meeting of 13 July 2011), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 119 votes to 1 with 11 abstentions.

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 **The coming years will see an increase in the internal mobility of European citizens and in immigration to Europe by third-country nationals.** These migration processes will enhance the EU's national, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity¹. The increase in mobility and immigration presents a challenge at local and regional level.

The European Economic and Social Committee condemns the recent actions restricting freedom of movement within the Schengen Area, and drew up an opinion² with a view to cooperating with the work of the European Council of 24 June.

- 1.2 One of the guiding principles of *Europe 2020 – a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* relates to the integration of immigrants. The EESC wishes to point out that economic growth and job creation and improved training and public services facilitate integration.

- 1.3 It is very important that the EU has **good common legislation** to ensure that immigration is managed by means of legal and transparent procedures. This common legislation must be based on respect for the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights in order to ensure that immigrants enjoy the same rights and obligations, equal treatment and non-discrimination in work and in society.

¹ OJ C 48/6, 15.2.2011.

² EESC opinion on Migration, not yet published in the OJ.

- 1.4 Against a background of economic and social crisis, **intolerance, xenophobia and racism** are on the rise throughout Europe, **including within the political agendas of certain governments**. The EU Institutions must be extremely active in the fight against xenophobia and discrimination towards visible minorities and immigrants, promoting equal opportunities and social mobility and cohesion. The media must act responsibly and informatively.
- 1.5 Local and regional authorities have political, regulatory and budgetary instruments for implementing integration policies. In many cases, there are national policies aimed at controlling migratory flows, but they remain very distant from the local and regional level, where the challenge of integration has to be faced. Policies have taken various forms: proactive, preventive, corrective and reactive. Local authorities have moved away from the approach which saw integration as a natural process free from difficulties and not requiring active and specific policies.
- 1.6 **The EESC believes that integration is not a legal act, but rather a complex, long-term social process, with many dimensions and many stakeholders involved, particularly at local level.** The social integration process takes place within society's structures and in various areas of people's lives: family, neighbourhood and city, workplace, school, training centre, university, association, place of worship, sports club, etc.
- 1.7 The social process of integration must be based on a legislative framework which guarantees "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"³. The first of the Common Basic Principles of the European Union's integration policy⁴ states that "Integration is a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States"⁵.
- 1.8 **Integration and social inclusion policies adopted by local and regional authorities should focus on a number of different areas⁶:** initial reception; teaching the language, laws and customs; housing; health; combating poverty; combating discrimination; employment and training policies; gender equality; education for children; family policy; youth policy; healthcare; providing social services and facilitating public participation. The staff of public authorities must reflect ethnic and cultural diversity and public employees must be given intercultural training Intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation should be promoted at local and regional level.

³ EESC opinion on Immigration, integration and the role of civil society organisations (2002/C 125/21).

⁴ Council doc. 14615/04. Common Basic Principles adopted by the Council and Representatives of the Member States on 19 November 2004.

⁵ COM(2005) 389 final. Agenda for Integration - Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union.

⁶ OJ C 347/19, 18.12.2010.

- 1.9 **Democratic governance** is based on the principle that all members of the political community should be able to take part directly and indirectly in the governmental decision-making process. If integration policies are to be successful, civil society and local and regional authorities must be actively involved in their drawing up, implementation and evaluation.
- 1.10 In a democratic society, everybody affected by collective decisions must be able to influence and participate in those decisions. Democracy in the European multicultural cities of the 21st Century must be improved through the participation of residents whose rights of political participation are restricted: residents from third countries⁷.
- 1.11 The EESC has called for **citizenship rights to be extended** to third-country nationals with permanent resident status in the EU⁸. It also calls for more flexible national naturalisation policies.
- 1.12 The EESC can contribute to the implementation of the conclusions of the Zaragoza Conference, by means of an opinion on **active citizenship** indicators.
- 1.13 The ninth Common Basic Principle, "*The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration*", has been inadequately implemented in the Member States. The third edition of MIPEX⁹ (which includes integration indicators for 31 countries of Europe and North America) concludes that most immigrants have few opportunities to inform and improve the policies which affect them daily.
- 1.14 The EESC believes that proactive integration policies should be implemented, with a two-way focus, targeting both the host societies and immigrants, the purpose being to achieve a society in which all citizens, regardless of where they come from, have the same rights and obligations, and share the values of a democratic, open and pluralist society.
- 1.15 In European cities, civil society is extremely active and works to improve co-existence and integration. These organisations represent wonderful social capital which can promote inclusive societies in each of its spheres of action **The EESC proposes that local and regional authorities encourage the activities of civil society and promote its consultation and participation** through public and transparent procedures, and that sufficient funding be provided. Funding systems must not restrict the independence of organisations.

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R. Gropas and R. Zapata-Barrero (2011) Active immigrants in multicultural contexts: democratic challenges in Europe, in A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood, and N. Meer European Multiculturalism(s): Cultural, religious and ethnic challenges. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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OJ C 208/76, 3.9.2003.

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Migrant Integration Policy Index III, 2011.

- 1.16 In order to encourage integration, governance must be improved by means of systems for civil society participation, and the EESC therefore proposes that **the role of existing local and regional participation and consultation bodies be strengthened and that new forums and platforms be created in cities and regions which have yet to establish them**, because public action is more successful when participatory systems are in place.
- 1.17 **The EESC proposes that Europe's municipal and regional authorities set up consultative councils, forums and platforms** so that civil society (immigrants' organisations and immigrant-support organisations, human rights organisations, women's organisations, social partners – trade unions and employers' organisations – and other relevant NGOs) can participate in and be consulted on integration policies. At municipal level, participatory structures can be adapted to reflect the specific local situation and can have either stable or more flexible structures. Local and regional authorities must take steps to remove the obstacles preventing participation.
- 1.18 The EESC believes that, **in the new integration agenda**, the European Commission should stress the importance of the local and regional level, promoting cooperation between political authorities and civil society organisations. It is at local level that integration takes place most effectively and a sense of belonging develops. Social and political participation is crucial to creating this sense of belonging.
- 1.19 The Commission's Communication should propose that structures be created at local level for consultation with immigrants and civil society, and **the European Integration Fund could work with local authorities to fund** these participatory activities, while guaranteeing the independence of organisations.
- 1.20 In the context of the forthcoming mid-term evaluation, the EESC believes that **the Fund's budget should be increased and that it should have more flexible funding systems for local and regional authorities**. Furthermore, Commission should manage up to 20% of the Fund, financing EU actions with high added value. The Committee shares the concern of many immigrants' organisations regarding the fact that the Fund only finances projects presented by large organisations with the capacity for high levels of match funding, but does not fund small local organisations.

2. **Background and general comments**

- 2.1 Through a range of opinions, the EESC has contributed to the establishment of a common EU approach to integration policies: the Common Agenda for Integration, the Common Basic Principles, the European Integration Fund, the ministerial conferences, the Network of National Contact Points, the integration handbooks, annual reports, the website and the creation of the European Integration Forum.

- 2.2 The **Lisbon Treaty** provided the European Union with a legal basis (Article 79.4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) for implementing measures to **encourage and support the work of the Member States to integrate third-country nationals**.
- 2.3 In 2006, the EESC adopted an own-initiative report¹⁰ to contribute to the implementation of EU integration policies from a local and regional perspective. The EESC stressed that integration policies were not the exclusive competence of the Member States, but also of local and regional authorities.
- 2.4 Good governance is needed in order to ensure that public authorities back this social process through appropriate policies. In keeping with the powers they have in the various Member States, local and regional authorities possess political, legislative and budgetary instruments that they must put to good use in integration policies. In order to guarantee the efficacy and overall consistency of programmes and actions, they must be properly supported, coordinated and evaluated at the three levels (national, regional and local).
- 2.5 The EESC wishes to stress that, at local and regional level, organised civil society is involved in and committed to integration policies and combating discrimination: immigrants' organisations, immigrant support organisations, trade unions, business associations, human rights and anti-racism NGOs; religious communities, organisations of women, young people and residents; educational, cultural and sporting organisations, etc.
- 2.6 The EESC has stated previously that work represents a fundamental part of the process of social integration, *since decent work is vital to immigrants' self-sufficiency, and it facilitates social relations and mutual understanding between the host society and immigrants*¹¹.
- 2.7 Education and training are crucial to integration and equal opportunities. Systems of lifelong training in companies must be bolstered in order to facilitate the recognition of immigrant workers' professional qualifications. The EU must establish more flexible systems for the recognition of academic and professional qualifications obtained in countries of origin.
- 2.8 The EESC has discussed¹² the greater social integration difficulties faced by immigrants when their situation is irregular, and has suggested introducing case-by-case regularisation for irregular workers to take account of the degree to which they have settled in social and employment terms, on the basis of the undertaking by the European Council under the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum¹³. Case-by-case regularisations would be carried

¹⁰ OJ C 318/128, 23.12.2006.

¹¹ OJ C 354/16, 28.12.2010.

¹² OJ C 354/16, 28.12.2010.

¹³ Council of the European Union, 13440/08, 24 September 2008.

out under national law for humanitarian or economic reasons, taking account of the greater vulnerability of women.

- 2.9 Article 19 of the Council of Europe's revised European Social Charter¹⁴ lists a series of principles for the integration of immigrant workers and their families which the EESC believes should provide the basis for people's development in cities. It has been ratified by 30 of the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe. The Charter provides for an important system of collective complaints which can be used by trade unions, employers and civil organisations (only 14 countries have ratified this system).
- 2.10 Furthermore, individuals and representative associations will have an increased opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action in accordance with Article 11 TEU. In an own-initiative opinion of 2010, the EESC welcomed this provision as a milestone on the road to a people's Europe¹⁵, through horizontal dialogue, vertical dialogue and the European citizens' initiative. The EESC believed that representativeness criteria (both quantitative and qualitative) should be introduced for the participation of associations, and proposed that third-country nationals permanently resident in the Union should be able to participate in the initiative.

3. **European Integration Forum**

- 3.1 At the request of the European Commission, in 2008 the EESC adopted an exploratory opinion¹⁶, which provided the basis for the creation of the Forum, with plenary meetings every six months at the EESC's premises. **The Forum has now held five plenary meetings.** The present opinion was the EESC's contribution to the fifth plenary meeting, held in May 2011, which discussed the importance for integration of the local and regional level. Its main conclusions appear in the Appendix.
- 3.2 The EU institutions, various experts and one hundred representatives of civil society organisations (immigrants' organisations, human rights organisations, social partners and other relevant NGOs) take part in the Forum. The Forum is consulted by the EU institutions, exchanges information and draws up recommendations to promote integration on the European agenda, taking account of national good practice. The Forum is assisted by a Bureau made up of four members (the Commission, EESC and two representatives of relevant organisations). Unlike the Commission's other consultation systems, the Forum expresses civil society's views in a structured, ongoing and proactive fashion.

14 European Social Charter. Turin, 18 October 1961. Council of Europe (Strasbourg). Revised: Strasbourg, 3.V. 1996 <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/>.

15 EESC opinion on The implementation of the Lisbon Treaty: participatory democracy and the citizens' initiative (Article 11) (2010/C 354/10).

16 OJ C 27/114, 3.2.2009.

- 3.3 The Committee committed itself to playing an active role in the Forum and decided to set up the **Permanent study group on immigration and integration (IMI)** within the SOC section. The permanent study group draws up opinions, holds hearings and contributes to the Forum's activities.
- 3.4 The Stockholm Programme¹⁷ also calls on the Commission to support Member States' efforts for improved consultation with and involvement of civil society, taking into account integration needs in various policy areas. The European Integration Forum and the European integration website must play a key role in this.
- 3.5 In several Member States and in some regional authorities, consultative forums and platforms have been created in which civil society organisations participate. These methods for the consultation and participation of civil society and immigrants' organisations operate most extensively at local level. They take very varied forms, according to Europe's differing circumstances and social and political cultures.
- 3.6 Prior to the fourth meeting of the European Integration Forum, the EESC asked the Migration Policy Group to draw up a report assessing the situation of national consultative bodies on integration¹⁸. There are national consultative bodies in 11 countries (in Germany and Italy there is a legal framework, but not yet an institution; in Ireland it has been set up recently). Fifteen countries have local consultative systems. In 10 countries there are regional consultative councils (such as Germany and other federal countries). In three countries (Austria, France and Greece) there are local consultative bodies, but not national ones.
4. **The Zaragoza Ministerial Conference**
- 4.1 The EESC contributed to the preparation of the last Ministerial Conference on integration in Zaragoza¹⁹ by means of two opinions²⁰. For the first time, two representatives of the Forum took part in the Ministerial Conference.
- 4.2 The Conference's conclusions stressed the need to create a **new agenda for integration**. The European Commission is completing its work on drawing up the new agenda for integration, in preparation for which the EESC drew up an information report²¹.

17 The Stockholm Programme — An open and secure Europe serving and protecting the citizen (2010/C 115/01). Point 6.1.5.

18 Consulting immigrants to improve national policies, Migration Policy Group.

19 15 and 16 April 2010.

20 OJ C 347/19, 18.12.2010 and OJ C 354/16, 28.12.2010.

21 EESC Opinion 518/2010 on The new challenges of integration, rapporteur: Mr Pariza Castaños, adopted at the plenary session of 15-16 July 2010.

- 4.3 The Zaragoza Declaration states that **civil society plays an active role in the integration process** and that a pilot project must be launched with a view to the evaluation of integration policies.
- 4.4 Member States, regions and local authorities must strengthen local integration initiatives and methodologies for citizens' participation. The creation of networks and the establishment of channels for dialogue between local and regional authorities and organised civil society will be promoted.
- 4.5 The indicators mentioned in the Declaration relate to employment, education and social inclusion, and also **include active citizenship**, because immigrants' participation in the democratic process – as active citizens – contributes to their integration and increases their sense of belonging.
- 4.6 The EESC, which participated in the Conference, pointed out that, as well as quantitative indicators, qualitative indicators should also be drawn up. **Furthermore, the EESC could contribute to the implementation of the conclusions of the Zaragoza Conference, by means of an opinion on active citizenship indicators.**

5. **Governance in cities**

- 5.1 The preamble to the 1985 **European Charter of Local Self-Government**²² states that "the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the democratic principles that are shared by all Member States of the Council of Europe". This right can be exercised most directly at local level.
- 5.2 **Convention 144 of the Council of Europe on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level (1992)**²³ states that the active participation of foreign residents enhances the development and prosperity of the local community. The convention undertakes to guarantee foreign residents freedom of expression, assembly and association, to promote consultative bodies to represent foreign residents at local level, and finally to promote the right to vote in local authority elections. However, very few Member States of the Council of Europe have signed this convention and the Committee therefore calls upon the Member States to ratify it.
- 5.3 The **European Charter for the safeguarding of human rights in the city**²⁴, adopted in St. Denis in 2000 by more than 70 European cities, states that the **city is the political and social space for an accessible democracy**. Active participation by citizens defines the city. The signatory cities undertake to recognise the right to participate in local life through the free

²² European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in June 1985 and open for signature by the Member States on 15 October 1985, the first day of the 20th session of the CLRAE.

²³ Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level. Strasbourg, 5.11.1992.

²⁴ European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, 18.5.2000.

and democratic election of local representatives, without distinction between foreign and national citizens, and propose that the right of municipal suffrage be extended to people who have resided in the city for more than two years. Taking account of the restrictions imposed by national legislations, they **call for democracy to be promoted by involving citizens and their associations in decisions concerning the local community** (through public debates, municipal referenda, public meetings, public action, etc.).

- 5.4 In **2003**, the members of the **Eurocities** network, made up of 128 large European cities, adopted a 'Contribution to good governance concerning the integration of immigrants and the reception of asylum seekers'²⁵. Drawn up by and for cities, this Charter contains general principles for dealing with integration. It acknowledges that local integration policies are more effective if they have the support of the whole community.
- 5.5 The **Committee of the Regions** (CoR) is particularly pro-active in relation to integration, having drawn up various opinions²⁶ which stress that local and regional bodies are at the forefront in drawing up, implementing, evaluating and monitoring integration policy, and it should therefore be seen as a key player in its development²⁷. The CoR also notes the importance of local and regional authorities playing an active role in the integration of immigrants, and is cooperating with the European Commission.
- 5.6 The EESC **adopted** an own-initiative opinion²⁸ addressed to the Convention that drafted the ill-fated Constitutional Treaty, calling for **European citizenship to be granted to third-country nationals having long-term resident status**. The Committee calls on the Commission and the European Parliament to adopt new initiatives to ensure that permanent immigrants are given citizenship rights, particularly at local level.
- 5.7 The 2nd Commission handbook on integration for policy-makers and practitioners²⁹ recommends investing in social organisation and mobilisation, in structured communication and dialogue and in strengthening local integration networks.
- 5.8 **SMART CITIES**³⁰ is an instrument for ongoing evaluation created in 2007 with the participation of 70 medium-sized European cities sharing sustainable development strategies in the fields of the economy, people, governance, mobility, the environment and quality of life. Various indicators are used. The EESC recommends that the proposals contained in this opinion be taken into account in relation to the indicators for people and governance.

25 Contribution to good governance concerning the integration of immigrants and the reception of asylum seekers, 28.11.2003.

26 Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on A Common Immigration Policy for Europe (2009/C 76/07).

27 Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening the global approach to migration: increasing coordination, coherence and synergies (2009/C 211/05).

28 OJ C 208/76, 3.9.2003.

29 Handbook on integration for policy-makers and practitioners. Second edition, May 2007.

30 <http://www.smart-cities.eu/>.

- 5.9 Intercultural Cities (ICC) is a joint action by the Council of Europe and the European Commission created during the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008. Its aim is to contribute to the development of an intercultural integration model in urban communities characterised by their diversity. It sees interculturalism as a means to promote policies and practices to reinforce interaction, understanding and respect between different cultures and ethnic groups.
- 5.10 In the document entitled Citizenship and participation in the intercultural city³¹ the ICC programme analyses the methods and procedures which cities can adopt in order to increase intercultural dialogue and interaction. The document reaffirms the principles of the **1992 Convention of the Council of Europe on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level**, and provides a creative approach, recommending more flexible forms of consulting in more informal contexts. It offers a complementary and valuable approach to long-term governance strategies based on consultative bodies.
- 5.11 A good number of Member States currently guarantee (totally or partially) the right to vote for foreign citizens: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. However, there is little active participation by the foreign population and the EESC therefore believes that public actions in cooperation with civil society should be promoted in order to boost participation by foreigners.
- 5.12 According to MIPEX III, in Europe, third-country nationals can stand as municipal candidates in 13 countries, vote in municipal elections in 19, vote in regional elections in seven and vote in national elections in two (Portugal and the United Kingdom). As we have already pointed out, there are national consultative bodies in 11 countries and local consultative bodies in 15.
- 5.13 The information in MIPEX III contains some very important indications, not just regarding countries which consult immigrants, but also regarding the development of genuine integration policies. **The countries with strong consultative structures are the countries that guarantee political freedoms for everybody**, back immigrant civil society with sufficient funding, extend voting rights and full citizenship and do most to promote full participation by all residents in consultative systems regarding employment, education, health and housing. MIPEX points out that consultative bodies are not a substitute for voting rights.
- 5.14 The strongest consultative councils in Europe are those which have been operating the longest (some since the 70s and 80s), and are found in the countries with the greatest traditions of immigration. On the other hand, the weakest are in the countries where immigration is most recent, in the south of Europe. The countries of Central Europe, which are recent recipients of immigration, have under-developed systems.

³¹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/paperviarregio_en.pdf.

- 5.15 An analysis of these platforms in light of the Council of Europe's criteria³² suggests that the creation and permanence of these structures should not depend upon the will of authorities and governments, but rather that they require specific legal provisions. They must be able to adopt initiatives and receive responses and information in the areas on which they have been consulted, and from the comments made at the 5th European Integration Forum it would appear that this is not usually the case. They must be representative structures with clear immigrant leadership and have sufficient financial resources³³. The EESC stresses the importance of ensuring that organisations are representative and that women participate.
- 5.16 During the drawing-up of the opinion, a hearing was held in Valencia on 30 March 2011 between the EESC and the Regional Government of Valencia, on **Cooperation between local and regional administrations and civil society organisations**. In the various speeches, experiences in the areas of consultation and participation were presented by Rome (Italy), the Flanders Region (Belgium), Strasbourg (France), Dublin (Ireland), the Hesse Region (Germany), Aarhus (Denmark) and Valencia (Spain). This opinion reflects many of the experiences and views discussed at the meeting. A report is attached in the Annex.
- 5.17 **The EESC believes that local and regional authorities should allow persons of immigrant origin to exercise the right of association**, since national legislations grant third-country nationals a limited citizenship status (insufficient and unequal recognition of the right to vote). Associations promote organised participation, strengthen solidarity networks, improve conditions for the settling and well-being of citizens and ultimately benefit the entire community.
- 5.18 **Local and regional authorities must promote the formation of associations, particularly for immigrants, and support them with technical resources** (advice on association management, democratic, economic, financial and communications management; capacity-building measures, leadership, particularly for immigrant women; promoters of forums and networks, exchange of good practices etc); **financial resources** (subsidies, agreements or the award of service-provision contracts); **material resources** (infrastructures for bodies: premises and basic resources for carrying out activities), particularly in the case of e-inclusion actions.
- 5.19 Local and regional authorities must promote **the inclusion of immigrants in civil society organisations**, as members and as directors. Of particular importance are residents' associations, parents' associations in educational establishments, women's associations, cultural, sporting and leisure associations, religious communities, and trade union and business organisations. Trade union organisations in Europe have a great tradition of membership and participation by workers of immigrant origin. There is great ethnic and

³² Convention 144 of the Council of Europe on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level (1992).

³³ Consulting immigrants to improve national policies. Thomas Huddleston, Migration Policy Group.

cultural diversity amongst their members and they perform a crucial social mediation function.

- 5.20 Relations between immigrants' associations and the rest of organised civil society must also be boosted, promoting the creation of networks based on common social goals for all citizens (education, employment, housing, town-planning and urban development). The European Year of Volunteering offers an opportunity to recognise and support organisations.
- 5.21 These take many different forms in the EU: forums, consultative platforms and councils, dialogue groups. The 3rd Handbook on integration for policy-makers states that a dialogue platform is a civic space "in which to begin an open and respectful exchange of views among immigrants, with fellow residents, or with government". The objective is for participants to develop shared understanding and trust.
- 5.22 The EESC believes that **the European Integration Forum must work in a network with the existing consultative councils and forums in the EU**. In the Member States as well, local and regional forums should set up networks. (There is a very interesting case in Denmark, where the 14 members of the national ethnic minorities council are elected by the 42 local forums.)
- 5.23 The EESC **wants** to promote more democratic cities in Europe, boosting **common citizenship** linked to residence in the city (urban citizenship, to use the words of the Deputy Mayor of Rotterdam), bearing in mind that the city is the most important place for developing a shared sense of belonging amongst highly diverse people. The majority of immigrants identify more with the city in which they live than with the State. It is in cities, first and foremost, that people share their problems, plans and dreams.

6. **The European Integration Fund**

- 6.1 The 5th European Integration Forum discussed the functioning of the Fund in the context of the mid-term evaluation being carried out by the European Commission. In accordance with its conclusions, the EESC proposes that:
- 6.1.1 Priority should be given to the **principle of cooperation** laid down in Article 10 of the Decision on the Fund. The Member States should therefore involve local and regional authorities and organisations representing civil society in the drawing-up, implementation and (ex post) evaluation of the multiannual programme and the use of the Fund at national level.
- 6.1.2 The Fund's current rules and procedures are too complex and create administrative barriers, hindering the funding both of civil society and of local and regional authorities³⁴. **The EESC**

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See S. Carrera and A. Faure Atger (2011), Integration as a two-way process in the EU: Assessing the Relationship between the European Integration Fund and the Common Basic Principles on Integration, Executive Summary, Centre for European Policy Studies, CEPS: Brussels. Available at http://www.ceps.eu/system/files/research_area/2011/02/CEPS EIF study summary.pdf.

recommends that those rules be revised in cooperation with the European Integration Forum and in accordance with the principle of cooperation, particularly those relating to the criteria of access, match funding, transparency and people. In order to ensure that the Fund provides added value, the EESC believes that all projects funded must guarantee that the first common basic principle – "integration is a two-way process" – is implemented.

Brussels, 13 July 2011.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Staffan Nilsson

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N.B.: Appendices overleaf

APPENDIX I

Hearing in Valencia: 30 March 2011:

Integrating immigrants in regions and cities: avenues for cooperation between civil society and local and regional authorities

The hearing was held in cooperation with the regional government of Valencia³⁵.

Opening session:

The first of the Common Basic Principles of the EU's integration policies was that *"Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States"*. This principle was re-affirmed throughout the various sessions of this hearing. It was also firmly stated that **integration was not a legal act but a long-term social process**, and not a legal one. **This guiding principle could only be put into practice by extending democracy within local and regional governance systems that incorporated civil society participation.**

In the very near future, Europe's diversity would continue to grow. The challenges of integration required EU, national, regional and local authorities to coordinate their efforts to promote these processes through sound reception and integration policies that ensured access to social, health and employment resources and to housing for all city dwellers, not to mention their social and labour market integration.

The interculturalism mentioned by Marta Cygan (European Commission) and Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños (EESC) was central to European values. Steady, unremitting efforts against xenophobia and intolerance were needed to ensure social cohesion.

One of the five guiding principles of the *Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* referred to migrant integration. **The European Commission was working on the new Common EU Agenda for Integration**, due in May 2011. **It would have a strong local focus – a need reiterated throughout all the hearing's sessions**, since this was where integration was at its most effective and where the concept of belonging needed to be developed. **Social and political participation was indispensable in order to foster a sense of belonging and cement civic integration processes.**

³⁵

Speeches and discussions are available on the event webpage of the EESC website:
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-integrating-immigrants>.

First session: Local and regional platforms for integrating immigrants - theory and practice

The approach taken in this first session set a pattern for all three sessions, which ensured representation for the regional or local authorities as well as their counterpart platforms or consultative bodies.

Michel Villan, President of the Council of Europe's European Committee on Migration, addressed the hearing on intercultural dialogue: **giving immigrants a voice and a vote in their host communities could enable them to go from being integrated to feeling integrated.** He pointed out that **poor interaction inevitably led to a poor sense of belonging.** He believed that there was a need for active policies that went well beyond the mere recognition of difference. Integration required commitment from all those involved in building a society based on fundamental rights.

It was necessary to **study how current policies helped or hindered integration.** Indicators had to be developed and all actions evaluated.

Speaking along the same lines, Mr Darif, President of Rome's *Consulta cittadina delle comunità straniere*, pointed out that we needed to **go beyond passive co-existence and promote spaces for positive cultural interface.** Multi-ethnic societies could not evolve and develop without the participation of all parties. Rome's *Consulta cittadina* had five years' experience and a good MIPEX III assessment. It not only promoted foreign migrant communities in Rome but also did a lot to facilitate networking among these communities.

Thomas Huddleston, an expert from the Migration Policy Group, presented a [video](#)³⁶ in which he combined the findings of the EESC study entitled *Consulting immigrants to improve integration policies*³⁷ with MIPEX III indicators. The presentation provided criteria to assess the efficiency of consultative bodies and a framework for discussions on the near future.

The Council of Europe's 1992 **Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (No 144)** gave some guidelines as to what could be considered a consultative body:

- participation by foreign residents in a crosscutting advisory capacity in the deliberations of local authority committees;
- consultative councils with purely foreign membership or with mixed membership (indigenous and migrant) to form a link with local and regional authorities.

Although **this Convention** had been ratified by very few States, it **could still serve as inspiration for the necessary evolution and development of European integration policies.**

³⁶ <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-integrating-immigrants-videos>.

³⁷ http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/eesc_study_on_consultative_bodies.pdf.

All speakers agreed that **participation and consultation were an aspect of European added value, as recognised in Common Basic Principles 7 and 9**. The European Commission, the European Parliament, the CoR and the EESC or the European Integration Forum called for its establishment and development as a prerequisite for extended democracy in EU Member States.

- eleven countries had national consultative bodies. 15 countries had local consultative bodies;
- ten countries had regional consultative councils (e.g. Germany and other federal states);
- three countries (Austria, France and Greece) had local but not national bodies.

Throughout the various sessions, presentations were given on experiences in Rome (Italy), Flanders (Belgium), Strasbourg (France), Dublin (Ireland), Hesse (Germany), Aarhus (Denmark) and the host city, Valencia (Spain).

Although a growing number of countries were setting up consultative bodies, some Member States had yet to do so. Furthermore, countries that had set up these platforms at the national level were inclined to do so at the local and regional levels. **These structures often depended on the authorities for their continued existence**. There were documented cases of governments setting them up and then arbitrarily dissolving them when consultation was not in their interest. On this issue, Mr Van Osterwyck, from Flanders, pointed out that local platforms tended to lack stability and risked disappearing. He believed that **at the local level** migrants should participate in existing councils of general interest (education, sport, employment ...), since forging ties with the rest of society through their common interests would heighten their sense of belonging to that society.

In general, they did not have enough power or independence to relay immigrant views. Even in the countries where they were most developed, they had not succeeded in attaining the levels recommended by European standards. These points were argued in the second and third sessions by the representatives of the Rome and Hesse forums.

What seemed certain was that the strongest councils were those which had been operating the longest (some since the 70s and 80s), and were found in the countries with the greatest traditions of immigration (BENELUX and the Nordic countries).

Consultation required good practice in the countries reviewing their policies and including comprehensive integration criteria in their laws and strategies.

It was noted that:

- half the countries studied by MIPEX had consultative structures (mainly national);
- in half the countries, members were freely elected or appointed by organisations, as recommended by the Council of Europe;
- the oldest consultative bodies allowed migrants to hold elections among themselves;
- it was these local councils that contributed to extending representative democracy;
- representative systems varied (national, ethnic, gender ...);

- these councils often lacked migrant leadership (usually ensured by the government); most of these platforms were consulted in all areas of government (crosscutting approach);
- under-funding was an issue and, once again, only the oldest and strongest were adequately funded.

Many of these platforms had a right of initiative but few had the right to a mandatory response from the government (usually at the local level).

MIPEX data shed considerable light not only on countries that consulted immigrants but also on how they deployed genuine integration policies. **The countries with strong consultative structures were the ones that guaranteed political freedoms to everybody, backed immigrant civil society with sufficient funding, and extended voting rights and full citizenship** (consultative bodies reinforced full citizenship) and did most to promote full participation by all residents in consultative councils on issues of general interest (employment, education, health, housing ...).

Ambitious and well-informed integration policies needed the following factors:

- legal organic structure;
- freedom to elect and nominate;
- right of initiative and reply;
- immigrant leadership;
- appropriate representative criteria;
- financial sufficiency.

Second session: Participation of immigrants in the civic and political life of regions and cities

In her introduction, Sonia Masini, a member of the Committee of the Regions, pointed out that local authorities were facing dramatic situations without the collaboration of the States and the EU (she gave the example of the massive migrant flows to the Italian island of Lampedusa). She **stressed the need for cooperation between different levels of government and recognised that the full impact of immigration was felt at local level**. Anti-immigration movements had a strong base. Moreover, she pointed out that a crucial effort was required from the authorities to support the development of the immigrants' countries and regions of origin.

Strasbourg's experiences were very significant. The city's deputy mayor, Ms Richardot, explained that **France had over 36 000 municipalities and only 18 of them had local consultative councils**. The City Council and the council of foreign residents were convinced that it was essential not to restrict the civil and political rights of fellow citizens. Participation mechanisms would contribute to alleviating social, ethnic and religious tensions in the city. Furthermore, **the considerable ground currently being gained by the French far right made it all the more necessary to give immigrants a political voice**. Although Strasbourg's council had been left to political chance, it was nonetheless true that its commitment and determination had led to the development of the first national network of citizen councils and recognition of the strategic need to progress towards

European networks such as CLIP and Eurocities. Strasbourg's council saw itself as a **privileged instrument for reinventing democracy at the local level by appealing to the citizenship of residence**. The council's electoral system consisted of drawing lots from lists of volunteers, in accordance with criteria of national representativeness and gender equality.

Dublin's representative outlined some of the more ambitious proposals in its overall integration programme. Mr Folan, from the Office for Integration, argued that integration policies could not be based on a top-down approach. The participation of the network of associations and the creation of a strategic alliance with it were essential (recognising their experience and making them partners in the project made it easier to share knowledge which the authorities often lacked).

The authorities could benefit from and promote many platforms for dialogue (fostering the formation of associations, sports networks, interfaith forums, shared resource centres, etc.)

The New Communities Partnership (NCP)³⁸ was a new independent network in Ireland that worked nationwide to support and empower foreign communities. It received public funding, although this never influenced it and was always unconditional.

The right to vote in Irish local elections was undoubtedly a sign of high levels of political participation. As Mr Huseini, representing the NCP, pointed out, local policies needed to attract voting immigrants, and this brought up issues that had never been raised before (adults legally resident in Dublin for over six months could vote). Strong campaigns organised by the NCP and the City Council had outstripped targets to get 10 000 foreign voters onto the electoral register by reaching 15 000.

Mr Ripoll Navarro, the regional vice-minister for European Affairs of Valencia (Spain), stated that his region was moving towards the recognition of full political rights and the approach could not have been clearer. **Integration could not be complete without the exercise of political rights.** He believed that recognition of this right would lead to a decline in the formation of ethnic-based organisations. For 18 out of Valencia's 591 municipalities, the immigrant vote could constitute a significant shift for local governments. Spain had recently granted local voting rights to certain immigrants.

Mr Jimena Quesada, President of the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights recalled the importance of the principles set out in the revised European Social Charter³⁹, and more specifically Article 19 thereof, which put forward an integration programme for migrant workers and their families to serve as a basis for personal development in cities. Thirty of the Council of Europe's 47 member States had ratified the Charter. He also recalled the importance of the system of collective

38 <http://www.newcommunities.ie/>.

39 European Social Charter, Turin, 18 October 1961. Council of Europe (Strasbourg), Revised: Strasbourg, 3.V. 1996 <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/>.

complaints, which could be used by trade unions and employers' and civil society organisations (only 14 countries had ratified this system).

Third session: Commitment of the host civil society and interactions with immigrants as tools for integration

Professor Zapata Barrero called on the European Commission to recognise the strategic role of cities and regions in integration. **European cities of the 21st Century had to bring fresh ideas to the debate on democracy** by opening their eyes to **a significant proportion of their inhabitants, whose rights of political participation were restricted**. The time had come to rethink the link between nationality and access to full political rights and to call for these rights to depend on residency. Integration policy depended on three key players, i.e. the local and regional authorities, indigenous organisation networks and immigrant organisation networks.

Mr Di Benedetto, representing the foreigners' forum of the region of Hesse, explained that current immigrant participation owed its existence to the foundations laid by German trade unions, which had opened trade union voting rights to the millions of foreigners who had enabled the reconstruction of Germany after the Second World War. The precursors of current foreigners' forums, which acquired a legal basis in 1990 (a legal obligation for municipalities with over 1000 foreign residents and entitled to State funding), dated back to the sixties.

However, **the main functions for representing immigrant interests and consultation on the adoption of measures with an intercultural dimension were inadequate. Decision-making powers were lacking**. Nevertheless, Mr Di Benedetto pointed out that the establishment of a federal integration ministry in 2009 owed much to the existence and work previously carried out by these consultative platforms. The foreigners' forum was a competent interlocutor on immigration issues but lack of recognition from some institutions and ignorance of the forum's recommendations and opinions were strong demotivating factors.

Germany's main challenge in recognising immigrants would undoubtedly concern the right to active and passive suffrage in local elections. However, before any of this could be achieved, structural issues with considerable implications for integration had to be solved. These included the need to speak the language, labour market discrimination or the high school dropout rates, which stringent selection systems, such as Germany's, entailed for immigrants.

The City of Aarhus (Denmark's second largest city) presented the functioning of the Integration Council, set up in 2000. It was based on the direct election of 15 members (12 elected by ethnic minorities, three by organisations and one by the business sector). Ms Larsen, the City Council's technical secretary, believed that it had a real influence on integration issues and this was demonstrated by the gradual extension of consultation to other city policies. **There was no doubt that for the present the Council was caught up in the definition of integration policy, but evaluation would follow in the future**.

Ms Kumarathas, chairwoman of the Integration Council, stressed the concept of shared responsibility for integration among all public and private stakeholders. She drew attention to some interesting integration dilemmas that had to be borne in mind. The dilemma of balancing belonging and independence would be resolved through recognition of the right to feel at home without giving up socio-cultural differences. The dilemma concerning the under-representation of ethnic minorities through voting rights would be solved through a strong commitment to exercising this right. Then there was the language dilemma, i.e. language as key or barrier to integration.

Concluding session

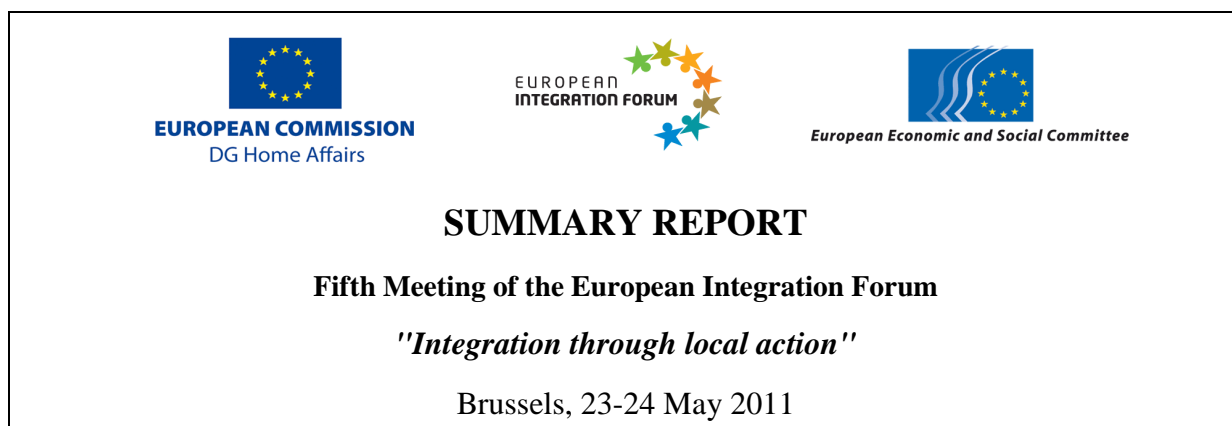
Joseph María Felip, Valencia's Director of Immigration, and Estrella Rodriguez, the Spanish government's General Director for the integration of immigrants, stressed the need for cooperation between all levels of government and the need to promote immigrant participation and the creation of forums and forum networks in order to achieve social cohesion and actively combat discrimination.

Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños (EESC), president of the EESC's permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration, informed participants that the fifth European integration forum, which would be held in Brussels in May, would incorporate the experience gathered. He also emphasised that he was convinced of the need to promote local and regional forums and platforms and expressed his commitment to reflecting these points in the opinion that the EESC was drafting.

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APPENDIX II



The objective of the fifth meeting of the European Integration Forum was to focus on the integration process through local action in terms of policies, implementation strategies and actors involved.

The opening speeches were given by Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Gerhard Stahl, Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions, Malika Benarab-Attou, Member of the European Parliament, and Korrie Louwes, Vice-Mayor of Rotterdam.

The need for a robust and long-term common immigration policy, as well as increased solidarity and a better sharing of responsibility was highlighted, especially following the recent developments in the Southern Mediterranean that put Europe's area of freedom, security and justice and the Schengen system under pressure. Migration is a reality for Europe, and an economic and demographic necessity. Integration is an essential part of the migration process but it will not happen by chance: it requires both the active participation of migrants and a strong commitment on the part of the society receiving them.

While the national level establishes the main integration policy framework, cooperation at EU level can provide tools for monitoring and comparing the effects of integration measures, sharing good practice, as well as helping to frame the public debate. The actions envisaged by the Commission in this area are based on the following key pillars: focus on participation as the means for ensuring effective integration, stronger emphasis on local action and bottom-up approach and better involvement of countries of origin.

Local authorities can make a difference to integration as they can tailor initiatives to meet their local needs. The local sphere is also the best level for involving all relevant stakeholders, including migrant organisations, employers, service providers, etc. in the integration process. In fact, the two parties in the integration process are not on an equal footing in terms of power and resources: the receiving society, its institutional structure and its reactions to newcomers are consequently as decisive for the outcome of the integration process as the immigrants themselves. Close cooperation between the

different levels of governance is also very important in order to coordinate the provision, financing and evaluation of services.

Societies differ from one another, just as people, experiences, and knowledge differ. There are different types of immigration that must be addressed in different ways – labour migration is different from the migration of refugees and asylum seekers. There is no "one-size-fits-all" model in the area of integration. Different approaches will work best in addressing different kinds of integration challenges.

The practical example of the multicultural city of Rotterdam, where 45% of the 600 000 residents are foreign born, shows that citizens should have more to say in the administration of the society, to allow for a certain "urban citizenship" to be developed. Government cuts, for example, have deeply affected language and citizen integration courses, and in practice language development in the third generation is even worse than in the second. The city is getting younger and the challenge of the future is to ensure that young people finish their school curricula and find a proper job. A strong coalition of local government with business and other stakeholders could help in developing everyone's talents, irrespective of their origin.

During the **plenary session**, Luc Van den Brande (President of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs of the Committee of the Regions) presented the results of the consultation on integration policies carried out during the spring by the Committee of the Regions among local authorities. 47 responses were received from 11 Member States. The results suggested that one key to an inclusive and cohesive society is to improve migrants' knowledge of the receiving society, its language and institutions.

Migrants need help in a number of areas, from access to labour markets to housing, welfare and establishing a cultural relationship with the local community. Voting rights and participation in local elections are considered very important.

Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños, Member of the EESC, presented the conclusions of the hearing on "Integrating immigrants in regions and cities" recently organised by the EESC. The impact of immigration on population growth and the labour force over the next 10 to 15 years, together with increased mobility of workers, will be felt throughout Europe. In order to encourage integration, governance must be improved through systems for civil society participation. Therefore the EESC proposes that the role of existing local and regional participation and consultation bodies be strengthened and that new forums and platforms be created in cities and regions which have not yet introduced them, because public action is more successful when participatory systems are in place. To that end, local and regional authorities need to cooperate with independent civil society organisations, while having access to a properly resourced and flexible European Integration Fund.

Good examples of migrant political participation at city level were presented by Anne-Pernelle Richardot, Vice-Mayor of Strasbourg and President of the French Council for Residence-based Citizenship (CoFraCir) and Alphonse Goueth, Deputy President of CoFraCir. Some French cities have in fact created Councils for Foreign Residents whose role is to facilitate political discussion

between the city administrations and representatives of immigrants and are a tool for democracy at the local level. They often make recommendations that otherwise would not be made. These councils are linked through a newly created network coordination body: the French Council for Residence-based Citizenship (CoFraCir).

During the discussion that followed, questions were raised about the real powers of the consultative councils and their future role, as well as the influence the European Commission can have on Member States in relation to granting voting rights in local elections. Comments were made on the need to involve NGOs more in local efforts to "help migrants integrate" (not to "integrate migrants"), as well as on research findings refuting various stereotypes, e.g. showing that social status dictates attitudes much more than national origin.

Summary of the round table conclusions

Round table A: **Diversity management and intercultural dialogue**

Increased numbers of migrants and diversity are challenging the capacity of civil society and public authorities and raising serious political and management issues. This has been exacerbated by the lack of a local agenda and the rise of the far right in many Member States.

To fight discrimination and allow upward social mobility several solutions were presented. Perceptions in the media needed to be changed and replaced with new, positive narratives. The EU should promote good practice and establish the basis for a strategy to fight against the far right and populism. Civil society must be empowered so that it can address (local) governments directly. Migrant youth should be involved in local actions. There should also be more training for those dealing with migrants, such as civil servants, medical staff and teachers. In the area of employment, there was scope for action by trade unions (e.g. having a "diversity coach" or excluding racist members), as well as "diversity charters" or "plans" in companies. Municipal authorities should create and follow guidelines on recruitment of minorities in public services. Moreover, NGOs provided several examples of useful free services for migrants, e.g. interpretation for new arrivals, and they should be supported in those efforts.

Round table B: **Political participation, including consultative platforms**

Migrants must engage politically and socially, but one of the challenges was whether migrants could identify with Europe's old white male political leadership. 19 EU countries give the right to vote in local elections while 13 allow migrants to stand for local election but the EU should push for every country to give these rights. The questions to be resolved were if the establishment wants new leaders, if there are real opportunities and who decides who represents whom. The EU should promote the creation of migrant consultative councils and facilitate exchanges between them. People also had the ability to shape the world in other ways, e.g. through civil participation, neighbourhood councils or volunteering.

Round table C: **Positive development in disadvantaged neighbourhoods**

The receiving society must ensure that migrants play a role in integration, contributing to a community identity without giving up their own. Problems in deprived neighbourhoods must be diagnosed at the source, partnerships must be established with local authorities, and fundamental rights such as the right to housing, education and health, etc. must be an integral part of policy. A one-stop-shop at community level would help promote newcomers' integration and independence.

Good quality accommodation is crucial, particularly for inner city social housing. People must be encouraged to look after their home, take pride in their neighbourhood, and work to enhance its image, as improving the opinion of others helps one's self esteem. Policies must discourage *ghettoisation* and encourage people to get to know one another, participate together in projects and thus foster mutual understanding of one another's culture. Employment which empowers people economically was key to helping integration.

Policy at local level must be based on partnerships and networks that enhance the work of all actors and forge links with neighbouring municipalities. Funding was the main answer to the question of EU initiatives to support neighbourhood development, together with sharing best practice.

Round table D: **European Integration Fund support at local and regional level**

The scope of the European Integration Fund (EIF) should be widened to include refugees, irregular migrants, circular migrants and immigrants from other EU countries, as many share the same problems and deal with the same institutions. The Fund should support the development of migrant associations, which are disadvantaged compared with local NGOs, and should be extended to include activities in migrants' home countries. The share of co-financing and matching funds that NGOs have to contribute is frequently beyond their capacity and should be reduced.

Greater exchange of information between national and international partners is needed. The European Integration Forum is a good example, but should be supported by national forums. Indicators to show what the EIF achieves and sets out to achieve are needed, together with an independent evaluation of the Fund's performance at national level. This is crucial, since the EIF has replaced national integration policies in some countries and become the main or only source of financing for such activities.

During the **conclusions session**, cross-cutting issues were raised by Professor Marco Martiniello, Director of the Center for Ethnic and Migration Studies, University of Liège (Belgium), giving rise to general recommendations in the following areas:

Recommendations on cooperation between local stakeholders and their cooperation with stakeholders at other levels

It is important to create consultative platforms where official representatives and migrants can meet and cooperate to identify needs and pass information up the ladder. There are a number of models, such as the Council of Foreign Residents in Strasbourg, local councils in Denmark, associated under a

national council, or the Barcelona Municipal Immigration Council. Migrants' organisations should be granted some privileges (e.g. no fees when joining a network).

Creating networks and sharing of information at different levels is essential - and the information needs to go back to the local level.

The point was made that if there is no political will at local level it is difficult to get things moving, especially if co-finance is needed. It is crucial to involve local politicians and key figures in any initiatives concerning migrants.

Recommendations on communication with the general public at local level

To prevent the general public from being influenced by anti-migrant groups, suggestions ranged from cross-cultural seminars, to employing cross-cultural liaison officers in local administrations and engaging the mass media and politicians to increase positive messages.

Recommendations on policy design and implementation

There is a need for greater cooperation across levels of government to define concrete policy objectives that could be adopted locally. Obstacles must also be communicated upwards to ensure they are taken into account in policy development, greater involvement at regional level should be explored.

Local policies should be based on direct contacts and consultations with representatives of foreign residents. NGOs should work together so as to get involved in policy development. Economic integration, through access to jobs, is very effective. Preparations can be started even before the arrival of migrants in the EU.

It was suggested that representatives from non-EU countries of origin should be invited to the next Forum.

During the closing session, chaired by Marta Cygan, Director for Immigration and Asylum, DG Home Affairs (European Commission), the speakers reflected again on the various facets of integration, noting for instance that while political issues concerning migrants and refugees were exposed by the national media, good practice at local level could and should be picked up by local media. The members of the Bureau of the Forum underlined that integration was not only a "two-way process", but a "multiple-way process", especially at local level, and that distinctions between "us" and "them" should be avoided. A positive approach to migrant issues was essential. The quality of democracy had to be enhanced in terms of involving migrants more in city governance and restoring the balance of political discourse towards values and rights, while steering away from xenophobia. There is hope for more cooperation between the Forum and national governments (via the network of National Contact Points on Integration), as well as with the European Parliament.