

***Meeting of the Working Group on OSCE and the Council of Europe
(COSCE)***

Danuta Hübner

***Chair of the Committee on Regional Development in the European Parliament,
member of the Group of Eminent Persons***

***Presentation of the report “Living Together: Combining diversity and freedom
in 21st-century Europe” of the Group of Eminent Persons***

Friday, 15 July 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the Lisbon treaty in force, we are attempting to create a new architecture of security, safety and cooperation in Europe. New building blocks of this architecture are emerging. Also, organisations like the OSCE and the Council of Europe are essential agents for creating the secure and cooperative environment in Europe. With the knowledge and experience that they have accumulated over the years, both organizations can be of inestimable value as durable elements of the new architecture.

I was invited to present to you the Report prepared by an independent advisory group under the aegis of the Council of Europe on the multidimensional and challenging issue of : Living Together in XXI Century Europe”.

A mandate of our Group, convened by Secretary Jagland in the Summer of last year was to look at the challenges to the European model of life that arise from „resurgence of intolerance and discrimination” on our continent. We were asked to assess, under the able leadership of Joschka Fischer, the seriousness of risks, identify their sources and, finally, make proposals for „living together’ in open society. Over a period of 8 months we worked very intensively as a Group – and the Report that I have a pleasure of presenting to you today is a fruit of our labour, but also of those with whom we met, talked and argued, and who are doing the job of creating conditions for living together in Europe.

We started with an assumption that European society is getting more diverse. This diversity is here to stay, and we cannot go back to some imaginary „golden past’ of some „old Europe”, as we would imagine it to have been. Europe will have to absorb in the coming years, and decades, more migrants from various continents, coming here with different cultural background and traditions. It goes without saying, that this new Europe will get new vitality when it comes to demography and internationalization of culture, but will also face a challenge of a changing social profile of the population. How we will handle this increased diversity will, to a large extent, shape the future of our continent. The report present a quite frank assessment of the situation: we can go wrong on many fronts, if we mishandle the

situation. We already see signs of this in rising tide of intolerance that metastasize into hard anti-immigrant policies supported by growing anti-immigrant populist parties who through democratic elections come to power on the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment. What not so long ago might have looked as scattered right – wing political opinion becomes in some countries a potent political force. Nationalism and even nativism is now something en vogue.

This combination of stereotypes, hidden fears and negative attitudes, reinforced by political power is a very dangerous mix. It can make the European society less hospitable to newcomers, more suspicious and having an increased tendency to societal separatism –closing in of „us” against „them”.

We try to say in the Report, though, that this dangerous phenomenon is not something purely psychological. The anti-immigrant parties profit electorally from the deep-seated insecurity of the large part of the population that stems from Europe’s economic difficulties and a feeling of relative decline. The immigration, in this context, is perceived as an economic threat. One may say that this is actually nothing new – always in history the immigration was perceived in remarkably similar way – even in the US, an open country with infinite space, it was welcomed with explosion of nativism, when it reached certain numbers.

Nevertheless, what we see now, has a certain new element to it. The feeling of economic challenge of immigration is accompanied by the discomfort of perceived or real cultural differences with the newcomers and the explicit fear of Islamic extremism. And, unfortunately, the existence of „parallel” immigrant communities whose members scarcely interact with the wider society around them does not help with alleviating those fears.

On the level of analysis, we also note in the Report that we are facing a double challenge of, on one hand, a possible clash between religious freedom and freedom of expression, and, on the other, the loss of democratic freedoms connected with immigration or anti-terrorist policies.

These dangerous possibilities arise, in my view out of the lack of confidence between the European societies and those who come here in search of a better life. We thus need the confidence-building measures within our societies, both on local and on national levels. That is why we included in the Report, put separately in distinctive „boxes”, examples of working for non-discrimination, inclusion and diversity by various groups or individuals whose activity in this field our Group has found as „commendable and worthy of emulation”. The challenge is not only to harness existing institutions but also, and this is much more difficult to change peoples' attitudes.

The authors of the report understand that we need all hands on board. We have come to the conclusions that only a very well synchronized, concerted and carefully orchestrated effort of many people and organizations can bring a success.

This is why we put forward a diversified package of recommendations and proposals, directed to representatives of various „strategically situated’ structures that can have a direct or indirect influence on political decisions, like member states, towns and

cities, European and international institutions, employers, trade unions, or those segments of civil society that have a responsibility for communicating visions and ideas: mass media, NGOs, churches, even celebrities and recognized „role models“. These proposals and recommendations are not prescriptions, but rather should serve as an invitation to further debate and action. I think that the open structure of the document can make it easy for everybody interested to relate to one or the other part of it and to apply its findings to a particular context of their field of work and activity.

I can imagine that the Report could actually become a sort of a handbook on the topic.

On the side of policy-oriented recommendations we do not call for new laws. The Report calls on the authorities and the member states to improve or fully implement the anti-discrimination laws in all areas of public life, including the media, public ones in particular.

Also, while respecting the right and the duty of the member states to control immigration, the Report calls on all Europeans to treat asylum seekers and immigrants fairly and humanely. The EU and the Council of Europe should reach out to their neighbours in the Middle East and North Africa and offer them the chance to participate, with an appropriate status, in European institutions and conventions.

As I said above, the migratory process is irreversible. The newcomers will come and live among us. We should be very careful though – in our policies on the states' and European level, as well as on the level of common attitudes, that „among“ is not a substitute for „together“. To avoid that error we should be guided by the principle of inclusion. We have to be open to the plight of the immigrants like those on Lampedusa, who need immediate care and attention. In this respect, when it comes to immediate and necessary response to a crisis, we propose in the Report appropriate solidarity and burden-sharing. But the policy of human managing of inflow of people is not a substitute for well-crafted long-term policies that would serve to integrate immigrants into the mainstream of society. It is our obligation to encourage the immigrants' aspirations to become fully citizens of Europe. In this respect the Report calls for fashioning „a comprehensive, coherent and transparent “ policy for the whole continent. I think that one of the most far-reaching recommendations included in the Report is the call on the states to „extent the full rights and obligations of citizenship, including the right to vote, to as many of their resident population as possible, and as an interim step, to give to all foreign residents the right to vote in local elections“.

If accepted, that recommendation would mean a one giant step on the way to our living really together, on the same street, in the same community, in such a way that we could share our humanity despite the obvious differences.

This participation cannot be conditioned, though, by the unfair expectation that immigrants have to become like „us“. On the level of principle the Report states very strongly that „group identities are a voluntary matter for the individual concerned, and that no one should be forced to choose or accept one primary identity to the exclusion of others.“ We are of the view that in order to embrace diversity fully, European societies need to accept the idea of a „hyphenated European“. There should not be anything strange anymore that there are Turkish Germans, or North

African Frenchwomen, or Asian Poles, for example. Such an attitude is not something that would come to most of us naturally – we would need a learning process to make this acceptance something obvious. Nevertheless the principle has been stated – and I see it as one of the challenges that the Report puts before us.

When it comes to tools, the examples of pro-integration activities given in the Report provide the “technologies of diversity”, if I may call it so – that show how to overcome the prejudices on both sides - immigrants and local populations - and how to establish a framework for understanding and cooperation for the betterment of a given community and „living together” in peace.

Such a peaceful living also needs that the immigrants already established in their new countries cannot close themselves off out of the larger communities. The danger of isolation and ‘communitarianist’ approach is often lurking inside the immigrant communities. It happens especially when immigrants feel hostility from the surrounding environment. The Report is quite clear about the fact that those impulses toward isolation are false choices, both for immigrants and for the European society.

We stress that European Convention of Human Right is a base document for regulating diversity, especially when it concerns the notions of individual freedom and equality before law. They remain the cornerstones of what we think Europe is. They cannot be changed, dismissed or forgotten, because they are the key to our European identity.

From that unshakable conviction follows the understanding that every human being, whether native or of a migrant background, whatever her or his faith, culture and ethnicity is entitled to equal treatment by the law, by the authorities and by her or his fellow citizens. The other side of the coin is that immigrants, like „all other citizens in a democracy... should have a say in making the law, but neither religion nor culture can be accepted as an excuse for breaking it.”

Since we were preparing our Report on the Council of Europe’s mandate, we directed most of the operational or specific recommendations to that body. Nevertheless, some of them are also of concern to the EU, the UN, or the OSCE. Some examples:

- as regards integration of migrants, we asked CoE to develop better indicators for measuring the success of member states’ integration policies and to develop guidelines addressing both rights and responsibilities of migrants within the framework of its future standard-setting work in the field of migration. Concerning citizenship, the CoE is asked to draft a study on the effects of different citizenship laws on the integration of immigrants,
- when it comes to asylum and humanitarian issues, we ask CoE and EU to design and implement a coherent and humane asylum regime, fully compatible with the CoE standards. CoE is also asked to create a migration trust fund, similar to the existing human rights trust fund,
- the report call on the EU, CoE and the OSCE to work on a comprehensive strategy in the field of the Roma inclusion, that should be treated as a priority. One of the aspect of such a strategy should be

working out measures that would effectively end Roma segregation in schools,

- we also propose specific action to be taken in the media field, such as a creation of a diversity coproduction fund with Eurimages (as suggested already by the Parliamentary Assembly,
- we also propose a regular process of follow-up of the development of intercultural dialogue policies in member states with the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue as reference.

To implement those recommendations, the Report invites the Secretary General to appoint a High-level special representative who would mobilize political leaders on the content of the Report and monitor its implementation. It also calls on the committee of Ministers to elaborate an action plan based on the recommendations and to draft a Code of good practices inspired by its guiding principles, that could be used by policy-makers, opinion leaders and civil society activists.

If I were asked to name the 3 most important key words in the Report that somehow characterize its general ambience, I would say: freedom, participation and expression.

Freedom, in this context, is dependent on the network of institutional arrangements that facilitate the free movement of people. Certainly Schengen is such an arrangement. I would say here that every attempt at weakening its regime is counterproductive and should be neither attempted nor accepted by the member states of the Union.

Participation is realized in the thick matrix of political life that is open to change, able to accommodate the growing diversity of society and to absorb its demands into the veins of the system.

Expression is something that is recognized as a right of every person and valued as an addition to a rich fabric of our society, and not something that has to be dispensed of like an old cloth when an immigrant reaches European shores.

The Report's goals are, at least in my reading of it, to promote freedom, to increase participation and to encourage expression.

When we were preparing it, our overriding concern was to make the project of „living together” in pluralistic Europe in peace, mutual respect and recognition of the others, something vital to all of us. We do not want it to become a matter only for activists, experts in diversity and immigrants themselves. That is why we want to involve as many stake-holders from among of the civil society as possible. NGOs, media, churches and individual citizens – they all should be engaged in a common effort to counter the stereotypes and misleading information about current and future immigrants. We feel strongly that in a new Europe, under the condition of observing the law, everybody should be welcomed and treasured as valuable person. In this spirit, we support the intercultural dialogue as something that is sort of a precondition for peaceful living together in the years to come.

Living together is not an option, it is a necessity. It should be cherished and protected. I hope that the Report I presented today is a means toward that goal. Now

it is finished, printed and binded. But I hope that it would not end as one more book or paper that we all have on our desks. The desire of those who sacrificed some months to prepare the Report was that it will live in communities around Europe and that people who care about our continent and its peaceful future will add to its proposals and examples their own that would make sense in their local communities and share it with others. Let make the Report itself a „living entity“!

Thank you very much for your kind attention.