

Danuta Hübner
Chair of the Committee on Regional Policy, European Parliament
Member of the Council of Europe's Group of Eminent Persons

Common Integration Policy:
Preventing Exclusion of Immigrants in the EU

"Living together"

Lublin, Poland
October 11, 2011

Immigration is a fact of life. People get on the plane, on the train or in extreme cases on the boat, and arrive to our shores to seek better life for themselves and their families. We'd better get used to it and treat this process as an opportunity also for our society.

It is our obligation to encourage immigrants' aspirations **to become fully citizens of Europe**. In this respect the recent Report of the Council of Europe "Living Together:", Combining Diversity and Freedom in 21st Century", of which I have had a privilege to be a co-author, 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*”. That would make local communities more inclusive and open to integration. Being a **citizen gives newcomers a dignity** and invites other people to treat them as equal. On the level of principles 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 the immigrants already established in their new countries, it means that they should not close themselves off out of the larger communities. The temptation of isolation and of creating “parallel societies” happens especially when immigrants feel hostility from the surrounding environment. **The Report makes it quite clear that notions of individual freedom and equality before law 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.**

When we were preparing the Report , 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. "Living Together" is not only a project for European, national, regional and local authorities. We want to involve as many stakeholders 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 a precondition for peaceful living together in the years to come.**

**I invite all of you to participate actively in this dialogue.
Thank you for your kind attention.**