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EU regions need mutual understanding and respect

24 November 2008 - Issue : 809

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Regional politicians from across the wider Europe have come to an agreement that the rewards of welcoming new migrants "far outweigh the negative examples of misunderstandings and prejudices." Those rewards, according to the Assembly of European Regions (AER's) Tampere Declaration on Migration and Integration, include the "richness of

society" and "competitive workforce" enjoyed by regions that are successfully integrating migrants into their societies.

Following adoption of the Tampere Declaration at AER's General Assembly in Tampere (FIN), Michele Sabban, AER's newly-elected president and vice-president of the Ile-de-France region (F), said: "Our declaration sets out policy initiatives the regions have committed to in order to better integrate migrants into their societies. These initiatives are based on the principle that integration is not a one-sided process, but one of mutual learning and respect.

As a migrant myself, I will use my personal experiences and commitment to these principles as a basis in urging the European Commission, the Parliament and the European states to follow the regions' lead."

THE TAMPERE DECLARATION:

Most European regions have a history of either emigration or immigration. Although the migration of populations has for centuries contributed to the development and diversity of Europe, this contribution has been tempered by challenges. Integration of migrants implies mutual learning, respect, and "give and take". Regions that welcome migrants according to these principles will invariably be rewarded with a richness of society and a competitive workforce.

These rewards far outweigh the negative examples of misunderstandings and prejudices. We, the regions of Europe, recognise that the challenge of integration requires regional efforts to be undertaken within the constraints of national policies. We are therefore committed to:

Integration through education, through mobility within and outside Europe and through promoting effective language acquisition – including a good command of their mother tongue – and multiculturalism from an early age while ensuring equal access to the education system; and by exchanging information on educational attainment.

Integration requires the ability to command the language/s and understand the educational norms of the host region, and language competence among citizens is crucial for the sustainability of our societies

Integration through employment by recognising qualifications and skills attained abroad, easing access to the labour market and developing targeted approaches for specific migrant communities, including the provision of micro-finance schemes to stimulate business start-ups;

Integration through access to housing by providing appropriate housing while avoiding the proliferation of migrant "ghettos" that lead to social segregation

Integration through equal access to services such as healthcare, giving information for migrants and recognising that regions require state-level support

Integration through gender equality by including a strong gender perspective in regional policies

Integration through politics and civil society by encouraging migrants to participate in regional democratic processes and civil society.

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Furthermore, whilst supporting migration within the European Union, we recognise that the costs of migration are usually borne at a local and regional level and require adequate recognition and resources from national governments and the EU.

Adopted by the AER General Assembly in Tampere (FIN) on November 14, 2008

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ANALYSIS



A death knell for global trade? ▶▶

The G20 should be applauded for agreeing to avoid protectionist measures and to revive world trade talks. **COMMENT 9**

IMMIGRATION Residency tests



A common approach to integration?

Standard content for courses agreed in Vichy

Value of compulsory testing is unproven

Jim Brunsten
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Both national governments and regional authorities have in recent weeks adopted declarations about the integration of immigrants into European society. They have stressed the need for closer policy co-ordination in an area where they feel Europe has much room for improvement. The reality, however, is that across the continent, opinions diverge markedly on dealing with immigrants. That may be no bad thing.

Setting policy on the integration of immigrants is for the most part the responsibility of member states. The EU has little formal competence for integration policy. Yet events such as the riots in the suburbs of Paris in 2005 and the murder of Dutch film-maker Theo Van

Gogh by an Islamist extremist in 2004 have intensified debate about the extent to which societies should adapt to newcomers and what policies are needed to ensure that ethnically diverse communities remain governable.

The subject has forced itself onto the EU's agenda. Some member states have begun imposing new requirements on workers from outside the EU and their families, demanding that they learn about their host country and show competence in its language. But such demands have knock-on effects for neighbouring countries. The French government has made immigration and integration one of the priority areas of its presidency of the EU, arguing that the ability of people to move freely around the Schengen area necessitates a common approach.

Convergence

At the urging of the French, national governments adopted a declaration at an

informal ministerial meeting in Vichy on 3-4 November, organised to "improve the convergence" of national policies. They made various promises, including that they would develop standard information on EU values for new arrivals, and common "European modules" for induction and language courses.

The Netherlands obliges people to take tests, as do Germany, Austria and Denmark. In France, newly arrived immigrants are obliged to sign a 'welcome and integration contract' by which they promise to learn the French language and values. Authorities are allowed to check whether they have fulfilled these commitments (for example, if the person has attended courses) before granting long-term residency. Other countries, notably Spain, remain opposed to such approaches, arguing that they are not desirable or effective. Earlier this month, regional authorities adopted a declaration on integration at the annual conference of

the Assembly of European Regions (AER). It commits authorities to ensure equal access for migrants to health-care, to promote gender equality and ensure that migrants have appropriate housing. Michèle Sabban, the president of the AER, says that integration policies in the regions are "very diverse". During a working group discussion on the AER declaration, representatives of regions were divided over whether they should promote migrant children's learning of their mother tongue. Sabban says that the regions are "at the beginning" of sharing best practice.

Warning

Advocates of closer co-operation on integration, not least the French government, argue that Europe has an integration problem and that co-operation could deliver improvements. But Sergio Carrera, a research fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies, a Brussels-based think-tank, who has pre-

pared a report on how to measure integration, says that a European drive to identify best practice, or develop a common policy, could misfire.

His report found that previous attempts at EU level to measure how well different countries or regions performed on integration, including projects funded by the European Commission, have "inherent vulnerabilities". He fears that what could emerge is a sharing of bad practice. He is particularly concerned about the spread of compulsory testing, saying that it is "too early at the moment" to say whether it helps. The first EU country to put such tests in place was the Netherlands in 1998. That law was overhauled in 2006 and is currently under review.

Equally, Carrera has concerns about sharing so-called best practice at a regional level. He argues that there is a "huge diversity" in the situations that dif-

ferent areas face: a good initiative in one region might not work elsewhere.

Rinus Penninx, a professor with the Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies at Amsterdam University, says that the Dutch approach reflects a "democratic impatience" for successful integration. He believes that integration happens over a generational timespan, meaning 25 years. The problem, as he sees it, is that politicians are elected every four years - "and they want to have policies that within these four years change a process".

The integration of immigrants is a highly contentious, politically charged issue, which is very hard for politicians to leave alone. The call by both regional and national governments for closer co-operation is understandable. But in the absence of clearer data, the EU may be well-advised to resist uniformity. The best approach for the moment could be diversity - and patience.



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Sabban is the new President of the AER

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Michèle Sabban has been elected President of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the largest independent network of regional authorities in wider Europe. Ms Sabban had served as AER Vice President between 2006 and 2008, and has been Acting President of AER since April 2008. Sabban was elected from a group of three candidates to the two-year post during AER's annual General Assembly. She has been President of the AER Observatory on Gender Issues since 2004. Sabban has also been Vice President of the Ile-de-France region of France since 1998, in charge of personnel, general administration and government contracts. She is also Vice-President of International Socialist Women.

Sabban has a degree in Fine Arts. Active in many associations, notably in the protection of Human Rights, she is committed to the acknowledgment of the place of women in the political arena.

The General Assembly further elected two Vice Presidents, Constantin Ostaficiuc (President of Timis, Romania) and Peter Straub (President of Baden-Württemberg Assembly), as well as a Vice President Treasurer, Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli (Minister-Delegate for European Affairs, Basel Landschaft, Switzerland).

Seats were also allocated for AER's executive political Bureau, which consists of members selected by fellow-regions of the 33 countries represented within AER.

Nationality:		Name:	Michèle Sabban
		Position:	President
		Working Languages:	ES, FR
	Institution:	Assembly of European Regions	
	Start:	13 Nov 2008	

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Angélique Kidjo and President Jakaya Kikwete

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11:00
Auditorium Erasme

13:00
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