

ASSESSMENT OF THE COMMON BASIC PRINCIPLES ON INTEGRATION: THE WAY FORWARD

Policy Dialogue - 6 April 2005

The European Policy Centre and the *King Baudouin Foundation* held a Dialogue entitled “Assessment of the Common Basic Principles on integration: the way forward.” The session was opened by **Françoise Pissart**, Director of the King Baudouin Foundation, and **Stephen Pittam**, Trust Secretary of The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and Chairman of the EPC Multicultural Europe Programme Steering Group. EPC Chairman of the Governing Board, **Hywel Ceri Jones**, presented the Issue Paper on integration while **Sandra Pratt** from the European Commission’s DG for Justice, Freedom and Security outlined the Commission’s future plans.

The Dialogue was divided into two panels. The first focused on “The common basic principles on integration - looking to the future” and was moderated by **Jan Niessen**, Director of the Migration Policy Group, Brussels. Joining him on the panel were **Nouzha Chekrouni**, Moroccan Minister for Moroccans Living Abroad and **Pablo López Pietsch** from the Spanish Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs. The second panel looked at “The engagement of economic and social actors” and was moderated by **Sarah Spencer**, Director at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at the University of Oxford. Speakers included **Gerard Oude Engberink** from EURO CITIES, **Manjit Singh Gill**, QC, a London-based lawyer specialising in immigration and human rights and **Catelene Passchier**, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). There were two brief question and answer sessions following each panel discussion. The Dialogue was concluded by **Stephen Pittam** and **Hywel Ceri Jones**. This is not an official record of proceedings and specific remarks are not necessarily attributable.

In her introduction, **Françoise Pissart** stressed that it was important to leave behind a pessimistic view on migration. While everyone could agree on the need for co-ordination at the EU level, it was not so easy to ensure integration of migrants was a priority throughout the EU, she said. Ms Pissart felt that the common principles could be improved if they were discussed to a greater extent within the EU institutions. The King Baudouin Foundation planned to launch a national debate in Belgium on how to implement the principles, the ultimate aim being to improve migrants’ living conditions.

Hywel Ceri Jones introduced the Issue Paper on the Common Basic Principles. Successful integration of migrants could not be taken for granted. Public policy had to be organised to make a success of it, he said. “If we fail to make a success of it,” Mr Jones argued, “we will suffer a double blow.”

- a severe blow to our economic prospects, since the skills and labour of migrants are essential to our prosperity; and
- a blow to the preservation of our distinctive social model in Europe, and our concern with achieving an open, inclusive society.

Responsibility for integration policy is shared between the local, national, European levels and is an issue of global scale. The Commission itself had openly admitted that “it has found it difficult to assess whether there has been progress in developing comprehensive strategies at national level.”

At present, the Common Basic Principles (CBP) existed on Council paper only. It was not at all clear how or when they would be applied or developed further by Member States and the Commission.

In presenting the Issue Paper, Mr Jones highlighted four main points:

1. The Commission must present a cross-cutting policy agenda, and take a holistic approach to integration policy. It must set out clearly the different levers needed to apply the CBP – policy, legal, financial and instrumental. Courageous leadership to mobilise the different partners involved in civil society was needed if the strategy was going to work and the principles were to be applied in practice.

Within the Commission, the inter-DG cooperation required had to extend beyond the obvious Directorates General for Justice and Home Affairs and Employment. Education, Development, External Relations, Enterprise and Research all needed to be fully mobilised in a Commission-wide team effort.

2. The development and adaptation of integration policies should be monitored by the Commission as part of its examination of social inclusion policies in Member States. This would be much more productive than to put the spotlight on integration in isolation from the objective of working for social cohesion and inclusion. A mainstreaming approach was the way forward, and the Commission should deliberately seek a real breakthrough by linking integration policy with the Lisbon Strategy.

At the European level, the integration (inclusion) of migrants also had to be seen in the context of the overall European integration process – the rights and responsibilities of all of Europe’s citizens. Making connections with and between citizens was a key challenge for the Union as it was only “with the hearts and minds of people in support of the further development of a deeper as well as enlarged Union that the Union can succeed,” he said.

3. The CBP adopted by the Council had to be embraced, interpreted and owned by local communities, especially in cities and large urban communities. The CBP could not be imposed from above. Local authorities and communities had to be full partners and actors in shaping the society in which they lived.

He raised the most serious doubts as to whether even 1% of local communities were aware of the existence of the Council’s CBP.

An integration strategy, especially at the local level, had to deal with the very different circumstances (the different trajectories) of migrant populations.

4. The European Parliament had a decisive role to play in this process. It should be urged to act as the catalyst in mobilising civil society in the broadest sense across national frontiers, and should

engage in a structured dialogue with national parliaments, to promote the further development and application of the CBP, Mr. Jones stressed.

He suggested the drafting of an inter-institutional declaration by all EU institutions. This technique had worked well in the past on the related issue of racism and xenophobia in Europe when the Parliament played a key mobilising role. The Parliament should again be urged to take the lead and build an alliance with the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) - the constituent members of both of which had vital roles to play at local level. By drafting an inter-institutional declaration, the EU institutions would give a very powerful signal to the public.

Mr Jones concluded that “the different stakeholders all need to feel a sense of shared ownership of the common principles so that together they can help project them into the public consciousness at different levels.”

Speaking on behalf of the Commission, **Sandra Pratt** said the EPC paper would give the Commission “cause for serious reflection,” adding “we are always looking for new ideas.” She outlined the progress made in the last couple of years on integration, such as the adoption of a Directive on the rights of legal immigrants, the creation of national contact points on integration and the publication of a handbook of best practices. At the highest level, she noted that the Thessaloniki European Council had mandated an Annual Report on Migration, while The Hague Programme, adopted by EU leaders in November 2004 requested that the Commission table proposals implementing the Common Basic Principles. These proposals should be unveiled in the summer, she said. A second edition of the handbook was scheduled to be published in 2006, while the Commission has just proposed a 1.7 billion Euro financial instrument for integration for the period between 2007 and 2013. Two key challenges lay ahead, she said: enhancing the role of civil society and increasingly involving migrant communities in the process. However, there was a danger of migrant organisations reacting negatively if they felt the purpose of such EU initiatives was to assimilate them, she warned.

The Common Basic Principles on integration - Looking to the future

Jan Niessen stressed the panel discussion he would chair could not be a “crystal ball session,” rather his intention was to explore the impact of the Common Basic Principles on the daily work of Member State administrations.

Nouzha Chekrouni said it was important to avoid making simplistic links between terms such as immigration, religion, Islam and terrorism. She noted that the initial wave of immigration from Moroccans to Europe had come in the 1960s - a time when the continent needed rebuilding after World War II. However, the profile of an immigrant had changed recently - with women often choosing to migrate independently (i.e. not just to be reunited with their family) and many educated people migrating, triggering something of a brain drain problem in Morocco. “Unfortunately, migration tends to be seen as a problem - the media does not mention the successes,” she said. For Ms Chekrouni, the two key words were citizenship and partnership: shared responsibility between Northern and Southern countries and greater inter-cultural dialogue. She pointed out that reforms were taking place within Morocco to strengthen the rule of law and ensure that men and women had equal rights.

Pablo López Pietsch felt that in today's neo-liberal world there was a dangerous temptation to take a self-regulatory approach to integration. He wanted to see greater leadership from the political elite: "we already have lots of debate but we need it steered and explained." The message that should be sent out was that "change in our societies is unavoidable and there is nothing wrong with it." He criticised the Common Basic Principles for focussing too much on what the immigrant must do and not enough on how the host society needs to adapt. A stronger pro-integration lobby was needed, he argued, noting such voices were currently much weaker than the refugee lobby, for example. But he also wanted immigrants to speak out more for themselves, in particular to demonstrate their adherence to European values.

The engagement of economic and social actors

The second panel discussion was chaired by **Sarah Spencer**, who said that civil society was "an under-valued and under-exploited instrument for bringing about integration." In bringing social and economic actors into the process, key questions needed to be answered, in particular: 'Who is covered by 'civil society' (e.g. faith groups, sports organisations, women's groups)?'; 'Who should pay for their involvement (e.g. should employers fund language classes for their immigrant employees)?' and 'What should the EU's role be if integration happens at local level (e.g. to share good practices or to fund them)?'

Gerard Oude Engberink, whose organisation represents 126 cities with 100 million inhabitants, stressed it was often urban and local authorities that provided reception facilities, housing and education for immigrants. Despite this, the word 'city' was rarely mentioned in policy documents. He criticised lawmakers for assuming that implementation happened automatically, noting "immigrants are not going to live in documents." While he backed the Common Basic Principles, he was unhappy about not being consulted in their drafting process. "We are not asking for funding, just consultation. We have experiences to impart, we know what works and what does not," he said. For example, he noted how in his city Rotterdam, where over half the population were of immigrant origin, churches and migrant groups were given a place at the table with the politicians - which had been very effective. Immigrants were given the right to vote in 1986, which led to new experiments in education and housing. Mr Engberink added "the most common value we need is to have respect for our differences."

Manjit Singh Gill took issue with the Common Basic Principles for not stressing the rights of migrant labour, for not enabling migrant communities to be the driving force in the integration process and for not obliging authorities to remove barriers to integration. "No one knows about them at grassroots level," he added. He wanted migrants to be encouraged to run their own housing associations, for example. While he opposed segregating immigrants, he also warned against a policy of dispersal, saying this could set back integration efforts, as immigrants' identities could become isolated and their identities stifled.

Catelene Passchier said migration should be seen neither as a problem nor a solution but as a reality. She said the Common Basic Principles were "not so bad" but she wondered how they would be used in practice. She harshly criticised the Member States for refusing to modernise draconian, restrictive policies on migration, adding, "I think there is a lot of leadership going in the wrong direction." She advocated having a European membership card for trade union members, arguing this would give workers a feeling of support when they moved to another Member State. Employers played a crucial role, too, she said, adding that while employers were usually more open-minded

than governments in terms of allowing immigration, they were less keen to discuss the rights of immigrants.

Conclusion

Stephen Pittam concluded by saying that the Common Basic Principles were “basically very positive” but could only be a starting point. He said it was vital to build links with non-governmental organisations and social partners and ensure coherence between what happens at the EU and grassroot level because “while integration is really a local issue, policy decisions are taken at European level.”

Hywel Ceri Jones reiterated the pivotal role the European Parliament should play “to get the action going,” adding “we do not want the Common Basic Principles to lie on the table as a piece of paper.” He emphasised the double role of the Parliament in raising the implementation of the Common Basic Principles with national parliaments and also in cooperation especially with the Committee of the Regions and ECOSOC to truly take the CBP to cities and local community levels. He also noted that the Issue Paper would be revised over the next two weeks in the light of the Dialogue before discussions before being submitted to the Commission and to the other EU Institutions.