

**22nd EFC Annual General Assembly and Conference
26 - 28 May 2011 Cascais, Portugal
DMIIG – EPIM Session: Diversity in Europe: a Crisis of Tolerance?**

Diversity in Europe was the subject of a lively debate hosted on 27 May during the 22nd European Foundation Centre (EFC)'s Annual General Assembly (AGA) and Conference in Cascais, Portugal.

Entitled '**Diversity in Europe: a Crisis of Tolerance?**', the debate was organised jointly by the EFC's Diversity Migration and Integration Interest Group (DMIIG) and the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM). **Antonio Vitorino**, former European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs and **Rob Berkeley**, Director of Runnymede Trust, addressed the session, which was moderated by **Sara Llewellyn**, Chief Executive of the Barrow Cadbury Trust and DMIIG Chair.

Opening the debate, Mr Vitorino referred to the current crisis of tolerance in Europe which is a result of the ongoing cultural and economic crises facing the continent. He expressed deep concern about those European countries that have questioned multiculturalism recently and about the growing number of right-wing parties with an overtly anti-immigrant discourse. He also drew attention to the problem of mainstream parties appeasing those perceptions.

There is no way to turn back time, stressed Mr Vitorino, who underlined the need to accept the multiethnicity of our societies. One of the major problems in the field of migration is the enormous mismatch existing between reality and public perceptions. He pointed to the responsibility of the media in contributing to those perceptions. An important pedagogical work is necessary in order to narrow this gap which is contributing to misleading choices such as that of focusing on border controls and returns when the vast majority of undocumented migrants arrive with a permit but then stay after the permit expires. The current economic pessimism has negative repercussions on the migration debate, said Mr Vitorino, noting that within European societies, those most exposed to economic hardship tend sometimes to express the strongest anti-immigration feelings. Hence, migrants are both scapegoats of the crisis and the first victims of the failure of the various integration policies, believes Mr Vitorino.

Civil society, NGOs and foundations and local authorities have a crucial role to play regarding integration policies, stressed Mr Vitorino. Local level is particularly important since it includes all the key players of the integration process, namely NGOs, business associations, trade unions, local authorities, churches and migrant representatives. Regarding migrants themselves, Mr Vitorino called upon them to come together in order to have a voice and stand up for their rights. As for foundations, Mr Vitorino noted they could bring added value to this process by exchanging good practices and highlighting successful experiences.

Until now, integration policies have not succeeded, acknowledged Mr Vitorino, who stressed the importance of learning the language of the host society, opening up access to social services to migrants, improving working conditions and addressing illegal work. He also called for an open debate about political participation, since he believes this is one of the missing links. Mr Vitorino concluded by underlining the necessity of being prepared for the challenges in the coming years, emphasising the urgent need of credible voices in the migration debate. In this context, foundations have the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the policy debate while avoiding the politicisation of the debate.

Speaking from the point of view of civil society, Mr Berkeley noted that multiculturalism is the dynamic balance between cohesion, equality and diversity with human rights as its basis. A key but missing element is political leadership, said Mr Berkeley remarking that politicians rarely speak about the benefits of migration and diversity. Another element which was mentioned by Mr Berkeley is the lack of meaningful personal contacts between the majority population and the different minorities, be they migrants or "new citizens". This lack of direct contact contributes to making the role of the media (including "social media") even more critical in this debate. Mr Berkeley concluded by saying that foundations can make a difference and encouraged further networking between foundations to know what works and what is useful.