

Panel statement by Mr. Jonas Widgren, Director General of ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) at the European Population Forum, Geneva
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Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This forum is to examine the implementation of the 1994 ICPD Action Programme in the ECE region and this panel is to deal with the migration components. When revisiting today the Cairo document and its Chapter X on international migration, two contradictory impressions emerge: its full validity in terms of a harmonized draft set of global principles yet to be enacted, and on the other side the realization that had this document been drafted today, it would have looked much different, taking into account the enormous boost during the last years with regard to multilateral migration co-operation.

Indeed, whereas in Cairo the tensions between sending and receiving countries were considerable, they are smaller today and in a couple of years time might be ripe to move forward to the adoption of a UN agenda on international migration. So much has evolved around the issue that the UN Secretary General recently urged for “a comprehensive institutional focus at the international level” with regard to the migration issue, and has instigated a number of countries to launch the Global Commission on International Migration, inaugurated in this very house only one month ago by the Secretary General himself.

Also at the European level there has been a tremendous development within this policy area the last ten years. I vividly recall the European Population Conference of 1993, also held here. International migration was for the first time treated in-depth in the ECE context and the organization had just embarked upon a very ambitious research programme, as had parallelly a host of other institutions in Europe. The security aspects were at the forefront: external security, as East-West poverty-driven population flows had skyrocketed up to 2.5 million in 1992, parallel to an aggressive war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, twelve hours car-drive from Geneva, generating refugee flows of 1.2 million people outside their country until the end of the war in 1995. Internal security, as the number of asylum-seekers in Western Europe, most of them with unfunded claims, in 1992 reached the peak level of over 700,000. Perspectives

were grim, characterized by a lack of long-term policy orientation and a “closing doors” mentality.

What a development since then.

When asylum figures went down as a result of efficient administrative reform processes, and hence the threat to Governments of having to downscale humanitarian commitments on national security grounds evaporated, illegal South-North migration rose on the other hand, in particular through the Eastern part of the continent. Again, only when these new irregular flows were under better control at the end of the 1990's, time was ripe for the EU Governments to take a forward-looking approach: the 1999 Tampere Summit launching the European security and freedom space; the sudden opening in 2000 of a debate on active immigration policies to offset the frightening European demographic perspectives; the heavy emphasis on partnership and co-operation with source countries in Africa and Asia instead of unilateral European action vis-à-vis them; the ongoing finalization in 2004 of a first set of community law on a common EU immigration and asylum policy, as stipulated in the Amsterdam Treaty, to be followed by an even stronger thrust on a unified system in the new EU treaty framework under negotiation. A tremendous EU development indeed since 1993.

Again to contrast with the situation 10 years ago. At the beginning of the last decade, Europe was in the grip of one big migration fear. Tabloid newspapers across the continent warned in large headlines of “millions of Easterners” flooding west and glutting the labour markets of Western Europe.

However, all experts are now very relaxed about expected future flows after this fifth EU enlargement. There are at least five strong arguments that speak against the prospect of a flood of new migrants from the new Members.

The first argument is based on the migration experience of the 1990s: only around 300,000 people of the new EU Member States are registered in the EU-15 labour force, or only around 0.3 % of the total EU-15 labour force.

The second argument is based on dozens of academic studies that have tried to estimate future migration flows from the new Member States after their accession to the EU. Over the past decade more than 30 such studies have been produced. Taken together, they all argue that future migration flows from the acceding countries will be relatively modest. Most studies see the long-term migration potential at only around 2-3% of the whole population of the new Members, from an initial level of some 250,000 persons annually to 125,000 persons after 15 years.

However, to safeguard their labour markets against possible surprises (and to re-assure their voters) Austria, Germany and other EU Member States have insisted on transitional periods for the introduction of the principle of freedom of movement from the new Members. This is then the third argument against large-scale East-West migration flows after enlargement: the seven-year transitional period.

A fourth argument speaking against large-scale East-West migration in the enlarged Union over the medium to long term is a simple economic one: through increased investment and trade in the new Member States, living standards in Central Europe will quickly approach Western European levels and thus the economic incentive for emigration will diminish. This has already been apparent over the last few years, with growth rates there typically exceeding growth rates in the EU-15 by far. It is expected that full integration into the EU internal market will further accelerate economic growth in the new Member States, thereby boosting employment and incomes. Experience tells us that significant emigration typically comes to a halt at around 60-70 % of the living standards of the destination region. Of the new Member States, Slovenia already achieves more than 70 % of the per capita income of the EU-15, while the Czech Republic achieves more than 60 %. Hungary will achieve more than 60 % by 2010 and the Slovak republic around 2012.

Finally, the fifth argument also applies to the medium and long term, but will be all the more important when it becomes stringent. I am talking here about the dramatic demographic decline of the new EU Member States, which, as you all know, is even more pronounced than the demographic decline in the current EU-15. With an average fertility rate of only 1.3 children per woman, the Central and Eastern European States will over the coming decades be confronted with a rapidly aging population, which will eventually lead to massive population decreases, a shrinking workforce and marked shortages on the labour market.

Actually, the enlargement will bring 75 million new citizens to the EU but will make the EU population even more older. There is therefore an urgent need to stimulate an increase in labour force participation rates all over EU-25 and in particular in the participation of women on the labour market from 60% to 70%. But in the present context even more important: governments have to seriously reflect upon how to achieve increasing immigration levels to Europe in the long-term.

Today, the population of the EU-15 is about 100 million bigger than the population of the USA. In 50 years, it will be 50 million smaller. The rapidly shrinking portion of the working population and the equally rapidly growing part of the elderly population is not only a threat to our social insurance systems, but to our economic productivity and in the long-term to our security. Planned immigration to Europe will therefore have to increase, but planned increased immigration from presently one to, say, five million a year is no demographic panacea, and is no migration management panacea, as irregular migration will continue parallelly, and as returns of unsuccessful claimants still will have to take place and the task to integrate the newcomers will be bigger. But if the European leaders do not deal with this delicate issue now, but prefer to push it further ahead, then we will have even greater problems in the future, both as a result of our more and more elderly populations and also of irregular migration.

The problem in a nutshell is that the transatlantic partners of ECE, namely USA and Canada together have an annual net intake of some 1,2 million aliens per year, representing about 0,5% of their total population but of this annual immigration as much as 65% is pre-planned through Parliament decisions, and only 35% unplanned. This contrasts heavily to EU-15, having an annual net intake of some 900,000 non-EU citizens per year, representing a bit more than 0,2% of their total population, but of this annual inflow only about 35% is pre-planned by Parliaments and 65% is unplanned, i.e. irregular migration.

Irregular migration from Africa will subsist as long as we pay 2 Euros a day per European cow in agricultural subsidies, instead of allowing these nations in Africa with hundreds of millions who live on less than 2 Euros a day to export their agricultural products to us. But this whole renewal of European immigration policies necessitates an enormous amount of

courage of leaders, and of solidarity between them, lest immigration will continue to be a short-term instrument for political maneuvering.

But, Mr. Chairman, I have not been asked to talk about this but about the integration of immigrants in an ECE context, and I will devote my remaining minutes on that. I have myself been intensely involved in the creation of integration policies in Sweden from 1967 to 1983, and when a radio reporter before the last elections in Sweden, when immigration was a hot topic, asked me in Vienna whether these policies created some 30 years ago had turned out to be a failure, I said “yes indeed”. I think Professor Penninx’s excellent paper to this forum in a way provides an explanation to the Swedish situation, when he writes about national perceptions of the official integration policies versus reality.

Let’s be plain. Integration takes place on and via the labour market. It is at this defining place that the success and failure of “integration” in modern societies can most clearly be seen.

My organisation has recently completed a comprehensive study on immigration and the labour market on behalf of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, which is also based in Vienna, and the results show dramatic gaps between the labour market success of natives and those of Europe’s immigrants – indeed, in many countries, the gap between natives and foreigners has widened over the past decade. Professor Bauer also highlights that in his paper.

Contrary to the North American experience, immigrants in EU from non-EU countries have much lower labour force participation rates and employment rates than natives or migrants from other EU countries. In some Member States, immigrants and ethnic minorities from non-Western countries have labour force participation rates that are 15 to 40 % below that of natives or Western migrants. This is the case, for example, for Turks in Germany, North Africans in France, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis in the UK and non-European migrants in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands. Female immigrants from Muslim countries have particularly low activity rates and are, for a variety of reasons, largely excluded from the labour market.

In addition to lower labour force participation rates, immigrants from non-Western countries are typically confronted with much higher unemployment rates than the majority population.

In some Member States the unemployment rates of third country immigrants are as high as three to four times the levels of the national average (for example in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden), while in others it is about double the national rate (for example in France and Germany). Everywhere, certain immigrant groups dominated by recent refugee flows (for example, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians or Somalis) face extremely high unemployment rates of up to 50 % and more.

What are the reasons behind these dramatic figures of failing labour market integration? Discrimination and exclusion certainly play a role here. But this is only part of the picture. Other factors play a more important role on the labour market and they are equally hard to tackle. First, structural factors in employment. Many immigrants were originally hired for low-skilled jobs and for manual work in industry, construction and agriculture. With the ongoing shift to a service-based, high-tech economy in Europe, these low-skilled jobs are disappearing fast and migrants are affected more often by lay-offs than natives as they are more concentrated in declining industries.

Which brings me to the second factor of high importance: education. Here, it is not easy to generalize, but in many countries past immigration policies have favoured low-skilled immigration of non-EU immigrants. And immigrants with lower levels of education find it increasingly harder to succeed in our knowledge-based economies. The importance of education, especially for so-called second-generation migrants, cannot be overemphasized.

Finally, a third factor, and that is the changing character of immigration in Western Europe. While immigration was mainly labour migration in the 50s and 60s, it quickly became family reunification in the 70s and 80s and asylum and illegal migration in the 90s. My point here is that as migration became less and less driven by labour demand, the labour market became a less and less powerful tool for integration. Thus, when designing integration policies, the link to a careful design of planned immigration policies is apparent. I refer to what I said earlier on the need for radically new active immigration policies.

And finally, what about immigration and integration in the Eastern part of our region? The new Member States are currently confronted with a very complex and dynamic migration situation that is characterized by three simultaneous phenomena: Slacking emigration, rising immigration and large flows of transit migration. In fact, several countries of the region

have already become countries of net immigration, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia. At the same time all Central and Eastern European countries have seen rapidly rising numbers of asylum seekers from outside Europe. The total number of asylum applications in Central and Eastern European countries during the years 1999 – 2003 amounts to a total of 170.000, in countries where only 10 years ago there were hardly any eligibility systems at all, and the number of resident foreigners in the Central European countries which now become EU members has grown from 300.000 in 1990 to 800.000 in 2000. Thus, these countries now have to finally realize that they are countries of immigration, just as Italy turned from emigration to immigration only some 25-30 years ago or Greece some 15-20 years ago.

Obviously, this development will have a major impact on integration policies in these countries, which mainly still are in a nascent state. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have over the last decade drawn much upon the wealth of expertise in these issues of the Council of Europe. As you know, integration policies do not form part of the EU Acquis and it is only recently that the European Commission more seriously has started to deal with integration issues as indicated in the June 2003 Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment.

Still the first steps are being taken. Most of the new integration programmes or introductory programmes in Central and Eastern European Countries are concerned with language instruction (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), education, vocational training (Czech Republic, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), legal (Bulgaria, Romania) and social assistance (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovakia) as well as financial support (allowances) (Bulgaria, Slovakia). Furthermore assistance in entering the labour market (Czech Republic, Lithuania, Romania) and ensuring housing (Czech Republic, Lithuania) is provided to immigrants in some countries. Moreover, programs and pilot projects for both low skilled and high skilled migrant workers are for example carried out in the Czech Republic. On the whole, therefore, integration programs in these countries, which have only recently become immigration targets, are on the right track. They try to also tackle difficulties on the labour market resulting from inadequate knowledge of language, education and qualification (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia). Regarding anti-discrimination legislation, too, the preparations for EU accession have already had positive effects.

I rest convinced that integration efforts will be stepped up considerably in Eastern Europe the years to come. Just one example, a few weeks ago ICMPD was contacted by Armenian authorities on how to establish integration policies. And there are many other encouraging examples.

Mr. Chairman,

In sum, what I have been trying to say is that European leaders both in the West and the East will have to more seriously consider the very grim demographic prospects for our region; how to generally raise the participation rates on the labour markets, particularly for women; in combination with a gradual increase in immigration levels; and that parallel to a continued combat of irregular migration; including a revision of trade and development policies; plus much tougher integration policies concentrating on education and labour market insertion; lest our continent will loose productivity, allow for divisiveness and ultimately for a smaller role in shaping the world.

Thank you.