



ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ- AVRUPA KOMİSYONU- EUROPEAN COMMISSION

ΑΝΤΙΠΡΟΣΩΠΕΙΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΥΠΡΟ- KIBRIS TEMSİLÇİLİĞİ- REPRESENTATION IN CYPRUS

## **The effective integration of migrants to local societies**

**Introductory remarks by Mr George Markopouliotis, Head of the Representation of the  
European Commission in Cyprus**

**Wednesday, 27 May 2015, 09:30**

**Holiday Inn, Nicosia**

---

*Check against delivery - Ισχύει μόνο ότι λεχθεί*

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today and I would like to thank the organisers for their kind invitation to address this timely conference.

Migration today is part and parcel of our societies. It is an inherent feature of our globalised world. It brings richness and opportunities, but it also comes with challenges.

The tragedies we have witnessed in the Mediterranean are a stark reminder that we need to take bold actions to deal with the growing migration crisis.

This is why the European Commission, on top of what it has been doing already so far, presented only two weeks ago its proposal for a comprehensive and holistic European Agenda on Migration.

This Agenda is not an emergency response; it is a strategy that will lead us forward in the next five to ten years. The logic that sustains the Agenda's proposals is very simple. Europe will extend a helping hand to those in need and will strive to attract those we need. This will be balanced by strong and targeted actions against those who try to abuse our system.

More specifically, this agenda build on four pillars:

First: Reducing the incentives for irregular migration, notably by seconding European migration liaison officers to EU Delegations in key third countries; by amending the Frontex legal basis to strengthen its role on return; by putting forward a new action plan with measures that aim to transform people smuggling into high risk, low return criminal activity and by addressing the root causes through development cooperation and humanitarian assistance;

Second: Border management – saving lives and securing external borders, notably by strengthening the role and capacity of Frontex; helping strengthen the capacity of third countries to manage their borders; pooling further, where necessary, certain coast guard functions at EU level;

Third: a strong common asylum policy: The priority is to ensure a full and coherent implementation of the Common European Asylum System, notably by promoting systematic identification and fingerprinting and with efforts to reduce its abuses by strengthening the Safe Country of Origin provisions of the Asylum Procedure Directive; by evaluating and possibly revising the Dublin Regulation in 2016;

Fourth: A new policy on legal migration: The focus is on maintaining a Europe in demographic decline as an attractive destination for migrants, notably by modernising and overhauling the Blue Card scheme, by reprioritising our integration policies, and by maximising the benefits of migration policy for individuals and countries of origin, including by facilitating cheaper, faster and safer remittance transfers.

Integration of migrants is a key part of this agenda, since our migration policy will only succeed if underpinned by effective integration policies. Although the competence lies primarily with Member States, the European Union actively supports actions by national governments, local authorities and civil society engaged in the complex and long term process of fostering integration and mutual trust. To this end, over the next 6 years the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund will make available more than 3 billion euro to Member States.

The EU's financial aid does not stop here. For the 2014-20 period, at least 20% of the European Social Fund resources, that is at least 16 billion euro, will be channelled to actions that promote social inclusion, including measures for the integration of migrants with a particular focus on those seeking asylum and refugees as well as on children. The funds can support targeted initiatives to improve language and professional skills, improve access to services, promote access to the labour market, inclusive education foster inter-cultural exchanges and promote awareness campaigns targeting both host communities and migrants.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must not forget an important additional challenge that we are facing, inside Europe. We need to change the perception of the public opinion on migration. Our biggest concern is the rise of racism and xenophobia, fuelled by populist movements across Europe. In this respect, civil society organisations can and do play a major part in promoting positive messages on migration. I wish to commend KISA and all those that are part of this EU funded Integro project which showcases that we need to cooperate on integration, to exchange best practices but, most importantly, to actually implement actions geared towards the integration of migrants.

Last but not least, let me emphasize that the European Commission is determined to build on and further develop coherent, comprehensive and effective policies that will allow all Europeans citizens and all migrants of all origin and community to find their place and have a bright future in our society.

Thank you for your attention.