

SPEECH AT THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

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**Members of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly
Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil
Societies and Culture,**

I would like to begin by thanking you for the honourable invitation that I received from the President of the Delegation to come here to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, and congratulating the Assembly for the choice of topics that will be dealt with today.

The topic that was allocated to me – *Migratory Flows as a Vehicle for Regional Development, based on the Portuguese experience* – concerns an issue which, although not new, has unquestionably grown in size and importance in the world today.

In fact, the phenomenon of human migration is a historical event that has accompanied the development of humanity itself. It can be seen to have taken place at such different times and circumstances as the establishment of the Greek colonies and the Roman conquests, passing through the Byzantine, Arab and Ottoman Empires, to the European colonisation and the large-scale migrations of the 19th century.

This phenomenon is still ongoing nowadays, with new profiles and stimuli generated by globalisation.

Over the last thirty years, capital and goods, services and different types of labour markets have woven an ever more intricate global network of economic and, to a growing extent, social interdependencies.

Migrations form an integral part of these interdependencies.

At the present time – according to UN data – it is estimated that there are around 200 million immigrants at the global level. There are very few countries, considering countries of origin, transit or destination, which are not affected by this situation.

In Portugal, the number of legal immigrants is now in excess of 430 000, representing 150 nationalities. These numbers are the equivalent of 5 % of the total population and 10 % of the economically active population in Portugal.

This is, however, a relatively recent phenomenon in our country.

Portugal, which used to be a country that was historically an origin of migration flows, is nowadays, simultaneously, a country of origin and a country of destination, that is: it is a country where people born locally depart to live and work abroad and, at the same time, a country that people flock to in order to live and work.

As this is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is a phenomenon that is not very clearly defined by Portuguese public opinion, which tends

to react more to the impact of immigration and underestimate the constant flow of Portuguese moving abroad.

This is, indeed, a commonly held belief by European public opinion.

The idea that host societies build up about immigration, its level of impact and its effects, is a determining factor for the balance of the migration phenomenon.

This is precisely the first aspect that I would like to focus on in my speech.

Mistaken opinions and all sorts of negative representations can be, and often in fact are, easily adopted by national public opinion with respect to immigrants. This is a special consideration to be taken into account when dealing with reception and integration policies.

To give you some examples, I would like to bring up the idea that immigration is a phenomenon that is prone to be a threat to public health, that it is a factor that is associated with increased crime, or that it is a threat to the destination countries' citizens as they will have to dispute a place in the job market with immigrants.

These are some of the ideas that, in spite of being wrong and easy to contradict, are often fallen back on.

In fact, immigrants have made a positive contribution to the Portuguese economy, to solving the demographic problem, and to rebalancing the social security system. They help their families back home by transferring funds to their countries of origin, they contribute to the enrichment of the destination country's cultural diversity and, finally, they are men and women who are searching for a better life, just like thousands of Portuguese have done so, and continue to do so, all through our history.

At a time when the worldwide economic environment is suffering from a number of well-known weaknesses, it is easy to run the risk of making immigrants its first victims, whether in the labour or the social sphere, as these people are also at the mercy of the spread of prejudices of the types mentioned.

Combating the spread of these ideas is something that must be assumed and embraced by the different players that take on an important role in this area.

In particular, the States' official position, the intervention of national institutions, non-governmental organisations and associations, and even the media, assume major importance.

In Portugal, the official position of the Portuguese Government has been to classify immigration as a positive item, recognising it to be a factor for development and as making an essential contribution at several levels.

As an example, I refer to that which is expressly written in the *Immigrant Integration Plan* (PII), which was approved by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 63-A/2007 of 3 May:

"The migration phenomenon, which has taken on a new profile in Portuguese society, is making an important contribution in the light of the internal weakness of the demographic situation, as well as being a positive factor for economic growth, for the sustainability of the social security services and for the cultural enrichment of the country."

This means that the Portuguese Government does not consider immigration in Portugal to be a fact that is merely accepted or tolerated, but rather that it is a recognised factor for development and is a desirable part of the legal framework.

As part of the role of the media, the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination (CICDR), an independent agency that specialises in the fight against racial discrimination and operates together with the High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI), prepared a document in 2006 – directed at the media and the security forces – containing recommendations concerning the disclosure of the nationality, ethnicity, religion or legal situation of people suspected of illegal acts, with the purpose of preventing the media from creating stereotypes in the eyes of public opinion.

Therefore, it has been proposed that information sources refrain from revealing the nationality, ethnicity, religion or legal situation of anybody who is the target of police actions or investigations or is suspected of being the perpetrator of any criminal or illegal acts in their official or unofficial communications.

Likewise, it was proposed to the media that they steer clear of mentioning nationality, ethnicity, religion or legal situation – within a framework of respect for editorial independence – when developing news items as long as this is not essential for explaining the events in question.

The assumption of this position takes on decisive importance, and is a necessary condition for full compliance with any plan to integrate immigrants, as a result of the cooperation of all the agents in Portuguese society.

To sum up, it is not possible to tackle development, and its relationship with the migratory phenomenon without, as a prior condition, checking and enabling the effective integration of immigrants into their destination countries.

The approach to migratory flows as a factor for development does not, however, end with an observation of their conditions and their effects on the destination country.

The national immigration policy has broken away from the traditional idea that used to look on immigrants as people who had left one life “behind” with the aim of starting a new one in the receiving countries.

The logic of Portuguese policy clearly breaks ranks with this binary point of view, which was centred on “source country” versus “receiving country”, or on emigration and immigration. It supports this action by recognising the existence of social spaces and communities that have a markedly transnational nature.

The concept of integrating immigrants, which clearly rejects the exclusion and assimilation models, also rejects the notion that immigrants can be described as sedentary groups that develop static relationships, exclusively in the place where they are found.

On the other hand, immigrant citizens are seen as a part of two or even more dynamically interconnected worlds, and of transnational migration itself. These are processes that immigrants develop and maintain, to join their places of origin and destination together.

Hence for the purpose of analysis, the societies involved are also considered to be a single, continuous field, connected by the practices that make up the immigrants’ transnational way of life.

The *Immigrant Integration Plan* (PII) includes the incentive to develop fund transfer systems, via public or private financial

institutions, which may or may not be banks, and to promote market competition as a way of reducing prices and improving the quality of the services provided.

Thus, at the present time, ACIDI has a field on its website that enables access to the banking products of banks, which have specific products for immigrants, and to the inherent costs and terms relating to transferring funds. This is found in the Frequently Asked Questions (*Perguntas Frequentes*) area, under the heading Transfers (*Remessas*).

On the other hand, the PII includes the forming of partnerships with the Governments of the countries of origin, in coordination with the Portuguese Embassies, for the purposes of ensuring that citizens that intend to emigrate to Portugal are given information.

As an example, I mention the experience of CAMPO, in Praia, Cape Verde. This is an information centre whose object is to welcome, advise, and make information available to immigrant citizens who intend to emigrate to Portugal, as a result of the partnership between ACIDI, the Portuguese Institute for Development Support (IPAD) and the Association of Immigrants from the Azores.

We believe that, through these mechanisms, immigrants will find it easier to not only become consciously aware of their initial will to emigrate, but also their subsequent integration into our country.

The creation of a situation that allows for “circular migration”, which allows for immigrants’ temporary or permanent return to their countries of origin without any loss of their acquired rights, is another of the actions planned in the *Integration Plan*, and is to be put into practice through bilateral agreements.

The entrepreneurship of the immigrant community is another of the aspects that is supported and encouraged in Portugal.

The involvement of NGOs, companies and institutions from the countries of origin and destination are also considered, in this context, as fundamental factors for getting the most out of the investment and the (physical and human) capital involved, as is the case, for example, of the presence in Portuguese companies of immigrant workers of nationalities with which these companies have special commercial relationships.

The ties binding foreign students to their countries of origin are another of the essential features of Portugal’s immigration policy, which the PII intends to develop, especially through:

- organising regular trips to their countries of origin;
- carrying out research and studies of these countries during the time that they are studying;
- promoting vocational internships that integrate or complement the study programme;
- supporting integration into the labour market in the country of origin.

The definition of goals for allocating differentiated study grants to each company, as a function of their corresponding strategic requirements, is another of the measures that is being adopted, as is the integration of internships in real development programmes that are supported by IPAD.

Elsewhere, the incentives to create and support Immigrant Associations have also been included amongst the priorities. The financial support for such activities provided by the High Commissioner for Immigration rose by 30 % in 2008, compared to 2007.

As a result of the current scenario of globalisation and the increased phenomenon of migration, especially from South to North, it has also been possible to see the drawing together of different civilisations. It is in this context that the European Union has decided to celebrate the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue this year, in 2008.

I would like to finish by mentioning the need to potentialise the dialogue between cultures and to make societies in the countries of destination aware of the importance of intercultural dialogue as a factor in the development of the countries of destination.

It was with this in mind that Fernando Pessoa wrote a verse which Portugal has adopted as its slogan for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which I would like to close with:

Be plural like the Universe