

No immigration without integration

Resolution of the Economic and Social Commission (Brussels - 16 November 2000)
adopted by the Brussels Central Council (10 December 2000)

Like it or not, the demographic pressure on the borders of the European Union will continue to result in a net inward population flow. These people are not merely attracted by the prospect of a higher standard of living and better social protection, but also by the existence, in all countries of the EU, of a growing deficit in the size of the working population by comparison with the number of inactive elderly people.

It would be a delusion for the European Union to even consider closing its frontiers, which are in any event somewhat porous, and to try to block these migratory flows. Both realism and the consideration of the EU's long term interests demand their being permitted, but preferably in a supervised and controlled fashion. This means in any event that illegal immigration should be fought strenuously and that those who make it into a business should be severely punished.

One way of considering this control would be – as certain governments have already contemplated – authorising, or even encouraging, immigration in a highly selective manner. The selection would be carried out on the basis of the age of the immigrants, so as to privilege the arrival of young working adults to partially bridge the demographic deficit, and of their qualifications, in order to respond to specific shortages of manpower and hence to remove certain obstacles to the pursuit of growth.

Such a narrowly economic approach to the issue raises a number of objections:

- ◇ remedying the demographic deficit by facilitating large scale immigration by young working adults risks creating or aggravating a similar deficit in their countries of origin, particularly in the case of Eastern Europe, and compromising those countries long-term economic development.
- ◇ similarly, countering specific shortages of manpower in the west through selective immigration of qualified workers will encourage a "brain drain" from the developing countries.
- ◇ it would furthermore be dangerous to base a long-term immigration policy on the observation of specific manpower shortages which are clearly evident today but which may well be short-lived, while longer term needs will differ and are far more difficult to identify.
- ◇ it cannot be ignored that the European Union still suffers from a high rate of unemployment, unemployment which affects disproportionately immigrants with roots outside Europe, even those born in and citizens of their country of residence.

This latter observation suggests that in order to resolve the problems of a shortfall in the active population by comparison with the inactive population and specific manpower shortages, immigration is not the first tool, which should be reached for. There is a primary need to **concentrate efforts on education and training** for young people, especially second-generation immigrants. For the immigrants already living in Europe, carrying out a trade is the best way of integrating into the host country and making it more open to them. Conversely, the unemployment, which some immigrants are suffering is an economic burden, does not contribute to their integration, and leads to reactions of distrust or even rejection on the part of European populations, which destroys social cohesion.

Integration via participation in the labour market must therefore be sought as a priority. Education at all levels and training must make a contribution to it by offering the same opportunities to all, regardless of their origins and on the basis of a "civic pact". It would furthermore be better if social security systems were to avoid too easily trapping unqualified workers into unemployment (the "poverty trap" issue) and that they should not be so easy to access that they constitute the primary motive for new immigration. It should in closing be noted that economic growth and the shortages of manpower to which it gradually leads are a powerful factor in attracting into the workforce those categories which are at present marginalised, as long as a sufficiently flexible labour market makes it possible.
