

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on 'Immigration, integration and the role of civil society organisations'

(2002/C 125/21)

On 31 May 2001 the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the third paragraph of Rule 23 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an opinion on 'Immigration, integration and the role of civil society organisations'.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 27 February 2002. The rapporteur was Mr Pariza Castaños and the co-rapporteur was Mr Melícias.

At its 389th plenary session of 20 and 21 March 2002 (meeting of 21 March), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. Integration and citizenship

1.1. During the 1960s and '70s, when immigration was promoted by European host countries, the prevalent thinking was that the immigrants then arriving in Europe would stay only temporarily. But now that immigrant populations have clearly become permanently established, the public authorities have come round to the idea that the majority of immigrants are bound to be integrated into our society. New immigration⁽¹⁾ policies⁽²⁾ must embrace this concept wholeheartedly.

1.2. The Communication from the Commission on a Community immigration policy argued that Europe's economic prospects and demographic trends made immigration a necessity and a key factor in our development. Public policy must therefore reflect the fact that large numbers of immigrants are a feature of present-day and future European society; in consequence, clear and effective policies for the social integration of the immigrant population are required. This means the entire immigrant population, not only immigrant workers: it includes their families, as well as refugees and people receiving other forms of humanitarian protection.

1.3. The concept of integration must be clearly defined if it is to be of use in all the EU countries, since the way social integration — not only of immigrants and refugees — is understood varies according to custom and cultural tradition.

1.4. The concept of integration put forward in the present opinion is defined as 'civic integration', and is based on bringing immigrants' rights and duties, as well as access to goods, services and means of civic participation progressively into line with those of the rest of the population, under conditions of equal opportunities and treatment. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights represents a reliable and useful platform for guiding new European legislation as well as national legislation.

1.5. The main benchmark of the civic integration proposed here is not how cultural aspects should be dealt with, but rather the concept of citizenship. Cultural diversity will be approached in a different way in each country, in accordance with the model in use, but this must not impact upon the principle of equality of rights and duties. In other words, whatever immigrants' cultural patterns may be, they do not detract from their status as persons who must have the same rights and duties as everyone else.

1.6. Cultural diversity cannot serve as a pretext for questioning the rights of immigrants. The Committee utterly rejects any denial of rights to immigrants on account of cultural differences. Religious freedom, for example, is a right which applies to immigrants as much as to all other citizens. All the basic personal rights, together with all rights guaranteed by law, also apply to immigrants, regardless of their cultural characteristics. In the same way as for rights, there can be no avoiding duties under the law on cultural grounds. Immigrants cannot refuse to obey laws or to accept the democratic norms of society for cultural reasons. Immigrants must respect the democratic values of European societies, and achieve social integration through democratic channels.

(1) The concept of immigration, as used in the present opinion, in some cases also extends to ethnic minorities.

(2) See the Communication from the Commission COM(2000) 757 final.

1.7. Cultural aspects are of great importance. Cultural diversity is a characteristic feature of democratic, pluralist Europe. Immigration from third countries amplifies this diversity of ours, culturally enriching our societies. Culture must not be seen as something static, but rather as constantly evolving and being enriched by a wide range of contributions. The cultural contribution made by immigrants must be seen against this dynamic view of our cultural development.

1.8. The Committee therefore wishes to emphasise immigration's positive contribution to Europe's cultural development, and roundly rejects any fundamentalist approach couched in terms of the 'risk of cultural contamination' or 'defending the essence of European culture from alien cultural traits'. Thinking of this kind runs counter to the principles of democratic pluralism and is detrimental to social and cultural progress in Europe.

1.9. Social integration is closely tied in with immigration and asylum policies. The process of social integration must begin the moment an immigrant arrives: the way in which entry takes place, and the rights granted to immigrants or asylum-seekers from the outset are therefore crucial. Illegal immigration and work in the black economy are barriers to social integration. It is therefore important to devise immigration policies which open paths to legal entry and define the rights of immigrants in generous terms. The Commission has prepared draft directives⁽¹⁾ on these questions, to which the Committee has responded in its opinions⁽²⁾.

1.10. Immigrants should adopt a positive, pro-integration attitude: to this end, they should be familiar with the language, laws and customs of the country in which they now live.

1.11. Knowledge of host country languages is a crucial factor for integrating immigrants. They should therefore be given the opportunity to learn them.

2. Work to date by the European institutions on policies for the social integration of immigrants

2.1. The European Commission is engaged in intense political activity under the provisions of the Treaty on European Union and within the political framework established at the Tampere European Council, adopting a range of

legislative initiatives which the Committee welcomes. However, the Committee has observed that progress is very slow at the Council, where an overly restrictive policy approach prevails. The Laeken European Council undertook to adopt a new approach giving greater impetus to common asylum and immigration policy. The Committee hopes that this undertaking will produce concrete progress within the Council and vigorous support for the Commission's initiatives.

2.2. Over recent decades, public bodies in the EU's Member States have introduced policies for the social integration of immigrant populations. The initial assumptions made about the temporary nature of immigration held up such policies significantly.

2.3. The Community institutions have also for many years been implementing policies for the social integration of immigrants. They have resulted in initiatives to facilitate integration into the employment market, education, etc., and in policies combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

2.4. As far back as 1994 a Commission communication on immigration and asylum policies⁽³⁾ argued that social integration should be one of the three key elements of immigration policy (the other two being cooperation with the countries of origin and control of flows). The proposals put forward by the Communication on a new immigration policy⁽⁴⁾ regarding the social integration of third-country nationals are based on offering equal rights, extending free movement and implementing measures to enhance immigrants' economic and socio-cultural position and against xenophobia and racial discrimination.

2.5. A wide range of Community initiatives has been pursued in this field: actions worthy of mention include the Integra programme, aimed at integrating groups vulnerable to exclusion into the labour market, which has enabled a large number of immigration-related projects to be implemented, and the current Equal⁽⁵⁾ programme, which pursues similar objectives. Mention should also be made of the European Employment Strategy, as defined at the 1997 Luxembourg summit, on account of its approach to combating discrimination in employment.

⁽¹⁾ See the proposal for a Directive on conditions of entry and residence in OJ C 332 E, 27.11.2001, and the Directive on refugee status in OJ C 62 E, 27.2.2001.

⁽²⁾ See the opinion adopted by the ESC on 16.1.2002 and the ESC opinion in OJ C 193, 10.7.2001.

⁽³⁾ See the Communication from the Commission COM(94) 23 final, and the ESC opinion in OJ C 393, 31.12.1994.

⁽⁴⁾ See the Communication from the Commission COM(2001) 757 final, and the ESC opinion in OJ C 260, 17.9.2001.

⁽⁵⁾ See the ESC opinion in OJ C 75, 15.3.2000.

2.6. Measures to combat racism and discrimination, an aspect of enormous significance to social integration, have been put in motion by the Community institutions, especially since the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force. Two directives — one on equal treatment of persons irrespective of ethnic origin, the other on equal treatment in employment — and an action programme for their implementation are already in force, laying down a solid base for pursuing anti-discrimination policies. The Committee however is concerned at the present unjustifiable delays in implementing the directives in national law in some Member States.

2.7. The creation in 1997 of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia equipped the European Union with a powerful tool for carrying out studies and putting forward proposals to combat racism and other forms of discrimination more effectively throughout the Community.

2.8. Although public bodies have made a clear choice in favour of social integration, it is no less clear that the policies conducted so far have proved inadequate. This is amply illustrated by the discrimination which immigrants continue to suffer, reflected in key areas such as their relative disadvantage in terms of access to employment, spatial segregation in urban areas and other aspects of social life, the social frictions visible in various parts of Europe and so on.

2.9. Social integration policies must be vigorously backed by all institutions — European, national, regional and local. Organised civil society should also be involved in providing this backing, as the only means of lending such policies the necessary degree of effectiveness. The Economic and Social Committee restates its willingness to make a decisive contribution to implementing new social integration policies and associating European civil society with them.

3. Integration policies

3.1. Integration policies must be implemented by public and private institutions, with the broadly-based and active involvement of social organisations. Policies must seek to remove the obstacles encountered by immigrants in gaining access to goods, services and means of participation in our society; job-seeking, housing, and basic, vocational and higher education, etc.

3.2. These integration policies must also focus on the host society, in order to change discriminatory attitudes, foster communication and compromise between immigrants and

the host society, and encourage social interchange, mutual knowledge and involvement in the broadest possible range of social forums. Integration policies must therefore include actions targeted at both immigrant and host communities.

3.3. Policies for the social integration of immigrants should not lead to a social focus on immigrants in isolation. Some action must concern immigrants in particular, but most initiatives must lead to immigrants using general channels and services and enjoying access to what society has to offer on an equal footing with the rest of the population.

3.4. The political impetus required to integrate immigrants must be reflected in increased public authority budgets. Action plans for integration must be drawn up at EU, Member State, regional and local level. There must be an acknowledgement that what has been achieved to date has been insufficient: the present levels of integration of immigrant populations cannot be considered satisfactory. The call for the Member States to make greater efforts on integration policy extends to the countries applying for European Union membership.

3.5. The Committee is drawing up an opinion⁽¹⁾ on an open method of coordination for immigration policy.

3.6. A Community framework programme

3.6.1. A wide-ranging European initiative, fitting in with other Community policies, is required as speedily as possible to promote new social integration policies. Within the Community, the European Commission must take the initiative and prepare a wide-ranging Community framework programme to promote the social integration of immigrants and refugees. The programme should spur the other institutions to step up their integration policies at all levels. The framework programme must be actively backed by civil society organisations and the European Economic and Social Committee can play an important role here.

3.6.2. Public policy must address the complete range of issues, beginning with immigrants' initial reception and culminating in their full and practical acquisition of the same rights and duties as other citizens. This means launching initiatives in many areas. This opinion cannot cover them all, but will indicate a number of those which seem most important.

⁽¹⁾ See the ESC opinion on an open method of coordination for immigration and asylum policy.

3.6.3. Sufficient resources should be available for initial reception to ensure that immigrants arriving anywhere in Europe do so under conditions conducive to integration. The Committee has drawn up an opinion ⁽¹⁾ on the draft Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of economic immigrants, proposing favourable conditions for economic migration. The Committee has also examined the conditions under which asylum seekers are received ⁽²⁾. In its opinions, the Committee has proposed backing for measures to ensure decent accommodation, advisory services for legal matters involving third-country nationals, multi-lingual information services, language courses available to all recent arrivals, employment guidance services, etc.

3.6.4. Employment integration is unarguably one of the main vectors of social integration, since in its absence integration in many other areas of social life will not take place. Employment policies must take account of the new immigration policy and facilitate access to employment for immigrants ⁽³⁾.

3.6.5. Housing and the urban environment lay bare the real level of social integration or exclusion. In many areas, housing and the urban environment present alarming indicators of the extent of the disadvantages and social exclusion suffered by immigrant populations — long-term residents as well as recent arrivals.

3.6.6. Full access to education, of high quality and delivered in a non-discriminatory environment, is another aspect of vital importance to the present and future social integration of immigrants. Using appropriate European machinery, the relevant authorities should recognise academic titles and vocational qualifications obtained in the countries of origin, avoiding any form of discrimination.

3.6.7. Health and other public social services must be accessible to immigrants under the same conditions as for everyone else. This means abolishing any form of discrimination and shaping services and provision of care in such a way as to ensure equality.

3.6.8. Action programmes are necessary at all levels to protect immigrants from racism, violence and all forms of discrimination. The public authorities, businesses, private bodies, the social partners and civil society as a whole must involve themselves in these programmes on a preventive basis. Foreseeing social problems of this kind is unquestionably the best way of nipping them in the bud.

3.6.9. Public institutions and civil society organisations must take on the task of fostering communication among Europeans, reaching across different cultures and highlighting the positive values of cultural pluralism. Cultural integration of immigrants and their descendants should be achieved in a way which acknowledges the diversity of their values and cultural traditions, the aim being for the intercultural approach to be the form of cultural development normally accepted by the host society.

3.6.10. Public participation must be able to rely on proper channels which open it up to immigrants. Involvement in associations, cultural life and active citizenship in general must be accessible to immigrants under the same conditions as for the rest of the population. This objective needs to be approached from a number of angles. Firstly, immigrants must be welcomed into existing associations in the host society: they must participate in neighbourhood and educational associations, employers' bodies and trade unions, political parties and movements, sports and professional bodies, NGOs etc. This means that associations themselves must root out any discriminatory attitudes and promote action in favour of equal participation on the part of immigrants.

3.6.11. Popular activities, whether cultural, religious, sports or leisure related, should be shaped to reflect the actual make-up of the population of our communities, so that immigrants can easily fit into them.

3.6.12. Social economy bodies are particularly helpful in integrating immigrants. Equal participation with other citizens facilitates dialogue and interaction between all people.

3.6.13. Integrating immigrants requires policies and initiatives which are sustained over time, if the types of exclusion and social segregation which presently occur in many parts of Europe, affecting the descendants of immigrant families, are to be avoided. People who are Member State nationals and second- or third-generation descendants of immigrant families are sometimes subject to racial discrimination.

⁽¹⁾ See the opinion adopted by the ESC on 16.1.2002.

⁽²⁾ See the ESC opinion in OJ C 48, 21.2.2002.

⁽³⁾ See the ESC opinion on the 2002 employment guidelines in OJ C 36, 8.2.2002.

3.7. *Monitoring and assessment system*

3.7.1. Alongside the Community framework programme, there should be a monitoring system under which the results of on-going social integration policies could be assessed. The system, which should be equipped with qualitative and quantitative indicators to analyse results, would have the task of defining specific objectives and laying down practical action plans. Recommendations would be submitted to public bodies and civil society at both Community and Member State level.

3.7.2. The monitoring and assessment system proposed should be a part of the open coordination method which the Council is to adopt on European immigration policy.

3.7.3. The proposed system should include the active involvement of civil society organisations, and of the European Economic and Social Committee in particular.

4. **The role of civil society in social integration**

4.1. *Employment and labour relations*

4.1.1. It is essential for people to have adequate economic resources to ensure they do not become socially excluded. Work is the means by which economic resources are obtained and vocational skills developed. Work also represents a fundamental link in interpersonal social relations; this applies to both the self-employed and employees.

4.1.2. Providing immigrants with access to vocational training, work and the accompanying social benefits is fundamental to achieving social integration. But labour integration is meaningless if immigrants are subjected to discriminatory behaviour.

4.1.3. In general terms, immigrants experience greater difficulty than host country nationals in setting up and running businesses, or in entering the labour market on an equal footing and securing high-quality employment. This is, of course, a difficulty encountered by many social groups and individuals, but it is greater still for immigrants whether unskilled or highly qualified. Vocational bodies must act to encourage immigrants to take up vocations under conditions of equality and without fear of discrimination.

4.1.4. Public employment services should, in cooperation with the social partners, adopt criteria contributing to the proper management of migratory flows. Immigrant job-seekers must register with the relevant public services, and to do so they must be provided with the right information. Trade unions and other social bodies can play a key part in transmitting this information. Where immigrants experience particular problems in gaining employment, the public employment services must formulate specific policies helping all individuals, without discrimination, to enter the labour market.

4.1.5. The social partners, who largely run the labour market and are basic pillars of economic and social life in Europe, have a significant role to play in fostering the integration of immigrants. Experience shows, however, that on the labour market and in the workplace many immigrants are subjected to conditions which infringe labour and social standards or to an unacceptable degree of discrimination.

4.1.6. In the context of collective bargaining and labour relations, the social partners must shoulder their responsibilities for the integration of immigrants. To this end, they should strive to eliminate any direct or indirect forms of discrimination from collective agreements and labour standards and practices. Discrimination can occur on the grounds of gender, ethnic or national origin, culture, religion, age and so on: immigrants often accumulate a number of these factors.

4.1.7. The Economic and Social Committee proposes that the Community's social partners, acting fully independently within the framework of the social dialogue, give consideration to promoting social accords and other initiatives in order to foster the integration of immigrants through better labour relations and working conditions, and eradicate discrimination.

4.1.8. Account must always be taken of the different systems for collective bargaining, labour relations and social security in the Member States; in all of them, however, there is a need for the social partners at national, regional, sectoral and company level to act as a means of assessment and negotiation to help immigrants integrate at work.

4.1.9. On-going training is a basic tool for promoting real equality between persons on the employment market. The social partners must step up their efforts, so that immigrants have access to such training under the same conditions as nationals. Immigrants who do not know the language of the society in which they are living suffer additional difficulties in securing on-going training and employment. For this reason, specific on-going training initiatives for immigrants not speaking the host society language are required.

4.1.10. Many people encounter additional problems in developing their careers simply because they are immigrants. The social partners must therefore strive, in a number of different settings, to foster real equality in career development and remuneration, free of any discrimination.

4.1.11. The Community framework programme proposed with the aim of enhancing the integration of immigrants must embrace goals and initiatives specially targeting the social partners, who should be drawn into the programme.

4.1.12. The employment guidelines⁽¹⁾, drawn up yearly through the open method of coordination, must incorporate criteria for managing migratory flows, together with goals and initiatives to encourage the integration of immigrants through employment.

4.2. *Local communities*

4.2.1. Immigrants sometimes live in run-down urban ghettos which have been abandoned by the public authorities. This form of social exclusion is unfortunately common in Europe, and is often a source of conflict. The word 'ghetto' is justified in cases of a high concentration of persons of a single national or cultural origin, frequently combined with negligence by the authorities and urban and social decline. Ghettos are not created by this concentration, but rather by the lack of interest by the authorities and discrimination in access to public goods and services, and to the social and civic life of the community.

4.2.2. People living under such conditions suffer an extreme form of inequality and discrimination. The social integration of immigrants into the local community must however be a priority objective of European civil society and of the public authorities.

4.2.3. Immigrants must be officially counted as inhabitants of the areas they live in, as from this administrative acknowledgement flow a series of specific civic rights and duties constituting a first step towards integration.

4.2.4. In most parts of Europe, a range of civic associations work in cooperation with the local authorities to improve the quality of life and promote good neighbourhood relations. Such associations have different features in keeping with the traditions of each country, but they all fulfil an important function as locally-based civil society organisations.

4.2.5. These associations must open their doors to immigrants, in order to build their concerns, problems and views into programmes and activities. The objective should be for all, including immigrants, to form an active part of their local community on an equal footing. Voluntary work, in which immigrants are involved alongside other citizens, is a highly valuable means of social integration.

4.2.6. In many places immigrants experience huge difficulties in obtaining decent housing, sometimes having to live in overcrowded, sub-standard accommodation, or being concentrated in outlying and run-down areas. The primary responsibility of the public authorities, especially local authorities, is to help such people find proper housing. To this end, it is essential that local authorities be able to offer social housing and public rent support for those in need (whether of local or immigrant origin), on equal terms with no discrimination. Sound urban management and efficient housing policy remain a necessary instrument for social integration.

4.2.7. Landlords sometimes refuse to let to immigrants: this is a clear instance of racism which cannot be tolerated. Local authorities must act decisively to stamp out such behaviour, which makes it all the harder for immigrants to find decent housing.

4.2.8. For immigrants to be integrated, they must be properly received by the local community. Sometimes, however, they are greeted with reserve, suspicion, or even naked racism and rejection. Many human rights associations are working to facilitate immigrants' insertion into local communities, providing much-needed solidarity and fostering social integration. Such associations also launch locally-based information campaigns so that residents can themselves root out any minority racist attitudes which may emerge. They also brief immigrants on their rights and obligations in their new host society.

4.2.9. These representative civil society organisations should be consulted by the public authorities when devising or assessing integration programmes; by the same token, their work should be backed up.

⁽¹⁾ See the ESC opinion in OJ C 36, 8.2.2002.

4.3. *The education system*

4.3.1. In our societies, children acquire knowledge and skills through the education system, which also serves as a forum in which to initiate the process of socialisation and citizenship and pass on social and cultural values. It is also of the utmost political significance, being a key means of bringing about equal opportunities.

4.3.2. Guaranteeing equal access to the educational system, from the pre-school stage onward, for the children of immigrants is a priority in moving social integration forward. But these children may encounter a range of practical problems in gaining access to and continuing their education under equal conditions, and suffer clear instances of discrimination in poor quality schools, with texts and materials which have no relevance to them, sometimes becoming the targets of discriminatory treatment by staff and fellow pupils. The political authorities should draw up policies designed to prevent such situations, which are unacceptable in European democracies. The educational community and its member organisations and associations also have a crucial role to play here.

4.3.3. Special attention must be given to training for woman immigrants. Language learning, awareness of human, civic and social rights in the host society, and vocational training are all essential tools for integrating women immigrants and their families, given the multiplier effect of women's training.

4.3.4. Teachers' trade unions and professional associations, employers and 'social initiative' groups must take responsibility for promoting equal opportunities for all children within the educational system, regardless of origin, ethnic group, religion, language or culture; together with the public authorities, they must also strive to ensure that the educational system serves as a conduit for the values of tolerance and plurality.

4.3.5. The content of textbooks and other educational material needs to be looked at in order to weed out any negative attitudes towards immigrants or any other element which is directly or indirectly racist or xenophobic, even if unconsciously, together with negative value-judgments about different cultures.

4.3.6. Parents' associations have a very important part to play in school society. They can fulfil a most valuable function in integrating the children of immigrants and ensuring they are treated equally in schools. They must welcome participation by immigrants, so that their concerns, and their children's problems, are properly aired.

4.3.7. One of the greatest educational problems facing the children of immigrants is that of moving on to vocational or higher education. The public authorities and civil society organisations must involve themselves in removing all existing obstacles and implementing policies to secure real equality within the educational system.

4.3.8. Structured adult education has a major part to play in social integration policies. The public authorities, human rights bodies and organisations working within the education system must work together closely to extend training at all levels to the immigrant population.

4.3.9. Immigrants' mother tongues represent a cultural value for those speaking them and for the host society: the public authorities should promote the learning and use of such languages in the educational system. Agreements with the governments of the countries of origin for the promotion of their language and culture are a positive factor.

4.4. *Health and other public social services*

4.4.1. In the European Union, the right of all individuals to health care and certain social services and benefits is part of a shared heritage: the public authorities are committed to providing them within the bounds of each Member State's health and welfare system. Immigrants must be entitled to use public health services and other social services and benefits on the same footing as nationals, without discrimination. Excluding people from the health system and preventing them obtaining the social services they need means discrimination and social exclusion.

4.4.2. Associations representing public service workers and users, as well as NGOs, have a very important part to play in removing the discriminatory barriers which often prevent immigrants from making use of these services.

4.4.3. Many immigrants are unaware of their entitlement to public services, and are unfamiliar with how they work. National, regional and local authorities should launch information campaigns, in the appropriate languages, to familiarise immigrants with the public health services and other social services. Immigrant associations, NGOs and civil society organisations working in the health and social sectors should join with the authorities in such campaigns.

4.4.4. Many associations, religious communities and NGOs in the Member States work to promote health and other social services. The membership of such bodies must include immigrants and they must implement programmes to facilitate immigrants' access to public services. They must also make sure that these services have staff specially qualified to deal with immigrants when required. In some cases, it will be necessary to run health training campaigns specially aimed at immigrant communities.

4.4.5. These associations and NGOs should promote activities to ensure that the public authorities take account of the specific needs of immigrants in their management of health and other social services, and adjust them accordingly when necessary, especially to resolve language problems in communication between service providers and users. They should also make allowance for cultural and religious aspects.

4.4.6. Public service trade unions and occupational organisations must be actively involved in programmes to bring health and other social services into closer contact with immigrants. Those working in the sector must step up their training so they can help immigrants use the services available.

4.4.7. The public authorities and civil society organisations should conduct ambitious information campaigns to familiarise immigrant communities with health and social services and enable them to use them on an equal footing with the rest of the population.

4.5. *Religious institutions and organisations*

4.5.1. Religions do not only represent bodies of specific beliefs and shared practices: they also promote morals and codes of conduct, which largely guide individual lives, especially the lives of those belonging to particular religious communities. Most bodies of religious origin promote humanitarian and welfare activities and values, and encourage civic engagement and attitudes conducive to integrating immigrants.

4.5.2. Under certain circumstances, extremist and intolerant religious positions can breed racism and exclusion. Europe's own history offers examples of this which must not be forgotten. Institutions and organisations of religious origin must root out any such manifestations of racism, particularly if religiously-based.

4.5.3. A wide range of humanitarian and educational organisations and institutions supported by various religions and denominations operate in different areas of social life. They are carrying out important work in favour of the social integration of immigrants.

4.5.4. These bodies can launch campaigns among their congregations and work with the authorities and other civil society organisations to foster coexistence between people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. They can also encourage interfaith cooperation, drawing in different churches or faiths.

4.6. *Sports bodies*

4.6.1. Sport is nowadays more than a purely personal activity. Mass-appeal sports in particular can create a collective identity and provide role models for children and young people.

4.6.2. Although violent racist groups — which must be combated — sometimes shelter among large numbers of sports fans, the reality is that in today's Europe, sport fulfils an important task in fostering ethnic and cultural equality and promoting social integration.

4.6.3. Associations, bodies and sponsors involved in the major sports must clamp down on racist behaviour in order to rid themselves of extremist groups and encourage social disapproval of such conduct, acting dynamically to promote a clear message of equality between human beings. The huge social impact of their activities means they must act responsibly.

4.6.4. Above and beyond obeying the law, the leading sports institutions and associations should draw up a code of conduct at European level to weed out attitudes and groups which deny personal dignity, and should foster humanitarian patterns of behaviour favourable to integration.

4.6.5. Sports associations and clubs must ensure that immigrants or people from ethnic minorities can take part without any form of discrimination, and that they are not in any way excluded from their activities.

4.7. *Human rights and civil rights organisations*

4.7.1. Numerous associations and institutions operate in the Member States to defend the human and civil rights of all. Many of them are highly experienced in the struggle for social equality and civil rights.

4.7.2. In European society, human and civil rights problems are affecting immigrants ever more seriously. As a result, the relevant associations and NGOs have long devoted much thought and work to the issue.

4.7.3. Anti-racist organisations are particularly beneficial. They perform an important task in denouncing violations of human rights, providing information and mobilising society. Their work to prevent this type of behaviour occurring in the first place should be highlighted. The fact that second or third generation descendants of immigrants are also affected by racism shows how seriously integration policies have failed.

4.7.4. Representative associations working in this field must be consulted by the public authorities when integration policies are being framed, and must be involved in the ensuing programmes.

4.8. *Immigrant associations*

4.8.1. Immigrants themselves often set up associations of widely differing types — to greet new arrivals, cultural or religious bodies, etc. — which are of great significance to individuals' social identity and in facilitating their social integration.

4.8.2. The public authorities and civil society organisations should forge cooperative links with immigrant associations: they play an important role in social mediation and represent an ideal means of transmitting information to immigrants.

4.8.3. The objectives of immigrant associations should include the social integration of their members and the establishment of cooperation networks.

4.9. *Women's groups*

4.9.1. Women's groups striving to achieve equality between individuals are of special significance. Woman immigrants frequently encounter specific problems regarding access to employment, training, recourse to social services and enjoyment of fundamental rights. Women's groups merit special attention and targeted support from the public authorities.

4.9.2. Women play a special role in social integration processes on account both of their need to see the specific obstacles in their path removed, and of their ability to pass on to future generations values which must reconcile social integration with the continuation of specific aspects of their own original culture.

4.10. *The media*

4.10.1. In today's society, the mass media represent the main channel not only of information, but also of social values and patterns of behaviour and moral and political attitudes. Their approach to immigration issues is sometimes sensationalist, inaccurate and irresponsible.

4.10.2. Many of the media and many journalists do their job properly, informing public opinion with positive messages about integration. Others, however, stir up feelings of fear and concern, providing a breeding ground for racism.

4.10.3. While fully upholding the principles of freedom of expression and information which are inseparable from the democratic system, the mass media should agree on a course of action against racism and in support of integrating immigrants.

4.10.4. The principal media must work with the public authorities to carry out campaigns inculcating the values of tolerance, cultural diversity and human equality among the general public.

4.11. *Political parties*

4.11.1. Consensus between the different political currents on supporting equal rights for immigrants and their integration into society is of enormous importance for bringing society as a whole round to this point of view. The message conveyed by political parties, especially at election time, must be a pro-integration one.

4.11.2. The accord signed between European political parties in Utrecht to prevent racism and xenophobia provides a model to be followed at national, regional and local level.

4.11.3. Immigrants and members of ethnic minorities should join and be active in political parties and movements, which in turn must stamp out any form of discrimination in their own structures. Political parties should adopt affirmative action measures to encourage minorities to engage in politics and stand as candidates at all levels, and especially in local elections.

5. Equal rights, equal duties: citizenship and voting rights

5.1. It is crucial to the development of the European Union as an area of freedom, security and justice, as agreed at Tampere⁽¹⁾, to guarantee that third-country nationals living legally in the Member States are treated fairly. To do so, an integration policy aimed at granting them rights and duties comparable to those of other EU citizens is essential.

5.2. It is unacceptable in a democratic system for large numbers of immigrants to live permanently with a lower level of rights. It is reasonable for the acquisition of the same rights and fulfilment of the same obligations as other citizens to come about progressively, matching the individual's length of stay in the Member State of residence; however, after a certain period of time, equality should be complete.

5.3. The directive proposed by the European Commission concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents⁽²⁾ marks an important step in this direction. This status would be acquired after five years' residence, and would entail rights comparable to those of EU citizens, including the right of free movement and establishment through the European Union. The Economic and Social Committee has drawn up an opinion⁽³⁾ endorsing these aspects of the draft directive, while suggesting some changes. Although adoption of the directive will represent major progress, equal rights will still not have been achieved.

5.4. Access to the nationality and citizenship of the country of residence offers full equality of rights and duties. It is therefore of the greatest importance that national laws should facilitate the granting of nationality and citizenship to immigrants who request it, and that the procedures involved should be transparent. Over the last decade, some countries have taken steps in this direction, but in most Member States the process still takes too long and is bound up in red tape. The laws governing access to nationality fall within the remit of the Member States and, in keeping with the principle of

subsidiarity, should continue to do so, but a degree of harmonisation of such legislation would be highly desirable, as would easy access throughout the European Union to nationality and citizenship for those who want it. Member State legislation allowing for dual nationality for those who voluntarily seek it is a positive factor for integration.

5.5. Equality of rights and duties should not, however, depend exclusively on the opportunity to obtain the nationality of the country of residence. Many people would not wish to seek this option, as it might involve loss of their original nationality, or for some other reason. Another path to equality must be available, and this can only be provided by long-term resident status. There should be only minimal differences in status between long-term third-country residents and Community residents, and these should in any case not affect critical aspects of social and civic life. To this end, progress must be made on issues such as citizenship and voting rights.

5.6. *European citizenship*

5.6.1. Articles 17 to 22 of the Treaty establishing the European Community define Union citizenship as complementing and not replacing national citizenship, which is a matter for each individual Member State. The Charter of Fundamental Rights moves towards 'civic citizenship' in the EU for residents of third country nationality, as indicated by the Commission in its communication⁽⁴⁾.

5.6.2. A citizens' Europe cannot contain another, non-citizens' Europe in its midst. Those living on a stable basis in the European Union must be treated in the same way and be recognised as having the same rights and duties at Community level as Member State nationals.

5.6.3. The Convention has launched a process geared to reforming the treaties and forging a new model for the European Union. The Convention will examine the concept of European citizenship and the role of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

5.6.4. 'Civic citizenship', based on the Charter of fundamental rights, as proposed by the Commission in its communication of November 2000 on a Community immigration policy, is one possible means of bringing European citizenship closer to long-term residents, but cannot become effective because the Treaty does not provide an adequate legal basis.

(1) See the Presidency Conclusions of the Tampere European Council.

(2) See the proposal for a Directive in OJ C 240 E, 28.8.2001.

(3) See the ESC opinion in OJ C 36, 8.2.2002.

(4) COM(2000) 757 final.

5.6.5. The Committee proposes that the Convention for the reform of the Treaties give consideration to granting EU citizenship to third-country nationals having long-term resident status.

5.7. *Voting rights*

5.7.1. No comprehensive proposal for equal rights and duties and for social integration would be complete without including the right to vote. This is a supremely important right for social integration, since it clearly signals who belongs, and who does not belong to a community. Being part of a community entails having the ability to take part in electing its representatives, and being elected as such. A part of the population from which the right to vote is withheld is, in a sense, being told that it does not belong to that society — which does nothing to facilitate social integration.

5.7.2. Some Member States have already allowed third-country nationals to vote in local elections. Similarly, the nationals of any Member State may also vote in European Parliament elections even if living in a Member State other than that of their nationality.

5.7.3. The Committee proposes that the Convention for the reform of the Treaties give consideration to granting the

right to vote in local and European Parliament elections to third-country nationals having long-term resident status.

6. **The European Economic and Social Committee**

6.1. As a body representing organised civil society, the European Economic and Social Committee can play a key role in preparing and evaluating European legislative initiatives facilitating the social integration of immigrants. By the same token, the economic and social councils and similar institutions of the Member States can play an important part at national level.

6.2. The Economic and Social Committee expects to be actively involved in all forums and conferences on immigration-related issues held by the other European institutions. The Committee wishes to be actively associated with the Commission, Council and Parliament throughout the legislative process on immigration and asylum.

6.3. In 2002, the European Economic and Social Committee plans to hold a conference in conjunction with the Commission on immigration and social integration to be attended by the Member States' economic and social councils, the social partners, other bodies representing organised civil society, and leading NGOs involved in social integration. The conference will also be attended by the other European institutions and bodies. The proceedings of the conference will make a positive contribution to the preparation of the Community framework programme to promote the social integration of immigrants.

Brussels, 21 March 2002.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Göke FRERICHS