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OBSERVATIONS on the Future of Migration

Costs, Benefits and Policy Responses

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6) Immigrant integration needs to be addressed in the broader context of overall social cohesion

Based on the paper “Immigrant integration, public acceptance and social cohesion”

by Didier Ruedin and Gianni D’Amato and workshops and discussions organised by ICMPD

More than societies in other regions of the world, European societies (and policy makers) have interpreted immigration as a challenge to social cohesion. There are three main reasons for this: 1) *a more diverse composition of migration* since the 1970s (comprising immigrants with no particular ethical, cultural or historical ties with their countries of destination), 2) *the end of exceptionally high economic growth rates* in the 1970s and 3) *a rethinking of the welfare state* in the 1980s.

Both ‘social cohesion’ and ‘integration’ are difficult to define. It is, however, obvious that cohesion within a society is a crucial aspect of its functioning and of the legitimacy of its political system. The various definitions of *social cohesion* refer to a *shared sense* of ‘inclusion’, ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’ within a society, the interconnectedness between its members and with the institutions, a sense of ‘solidarity’, ‘community’ and ‘orientation towards a common good’.

The debate on *integration* has also not resulted in a commonly accepted definition of the underlying concept. Central to all concepts, however, is the *understanding that integration is a mutual and reciprocal process* which requires the involvement of both the migrants and the resident population. Migrants have to obtain the necessary means to participate in the economic, cultural and social life of the receiving societies; they have to *benefit from equal rights and access to opportunities* and are subject to the *same duties* as the domestic population.

Today, integration policies are seen as a *key element of migration management in order to promote social cohesion*. It would be wrong to argue that social cohesion is challenged solely by migration. Other factors like modernisation,

globalisation, and changing economic structures, cultural codes and lifestyles are even more important factors in this regard. Integration policies are important instruments as long as they are embedded in overall policies promoting social cohesion for both migrants and non-migrants. Economic aspects are key, i.e. sufficient jobs and economic prospects for migrants and non-migrants, but social and cultural aspects also deserve attention as long as they are addressed to the society as a whole.

European states need to address integration in the broader context of overall social cohesion.

- European states will have to better *address all challenges* to social cohesion that result from modernisation and change. Immigration and integration are important sub-issues, but not the most important factor in ensuring social cohesion.
- *Social cohesion needs to be promoted at all levels and for the whole society.* Related policies have to promote jobs and create economic opportunities but also foster exchange and interaction between the various social groups with a view to creating a joint sense of identity, belonging and community.