

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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**Migration, External Relations and the European  
Neighbourhood Policy**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

First let me thank our hosts the International Organisation for Migration, the Belgian Government and the Austrian Presidency for this invitation to address you today.

2005 was a difficult year for the EU. The disaffection sweeping certain EU Member States about the role and direction of the EU was brought home sharply. It is understandable that our citizens now take our most impressive achievement, peace, for granted. We should rejoice that they can take it for granted. But that means we have to work hard to show our citizens the EU is relevant to their present-day concerns.

One of the most deep rooted concerns is migration. It is a complicated issue, which goes to the heart of political debate in Europe. Yet all too often it is presented in simplistic, sensational terms, which do no justice to the complex factors behind it. I do not need to remind you of the sensitivity of this issue for EU public opinion. In uncertain times, when the forces of globalisation seem to be sweeping all in their path, it is understandable that our citizens are worried about employment and increased competition for jobs. But the prevailing view of migration is, unfortunately, based more on emotion than on fact.

Migration is a fact of life. It is a reality which will not disappear tomorrow. For centuries Europe itself was a source of migration. Now we are an attractive destination for migrants. What is new in all this is the volume and scale of the movement of people across international borders - an inherent part of globalisation which has been driving the world ever faster over the last half century.

But the truth is, Europe needs migration. Our populations are getting smaller and growing older. In many European countries the net increase in population is already entirely due to immigration. By 2050 the population of my own country, Austria, would shrink by a quarter if there were no immigration.

In Italy, one in three Italians would be over 65 years of age. If that were to happen, there would be jobs left vacant and services left unfulfilled. The EU's growth rates would plummet, as would our standard of living.

Immigration is an important part of the solution. It will help us make the transition to a new economic situation, and maintain a certain level of growth. To maintain their dynamism countries need human capacity. For Europe, with its falling, ageing population that will inevitably mean attracting brains and labour from outside.

This needs to be reflected in public policy making now. We are already behind the curve compared to the United States which for some years now has had a programme targeting skilled labour in the very countries we in Europe should be targeting.

But of course we need legal migration. Illegal immigration brings a whole host of problems, from the desperate conditions in which some seek to enter the EU – suffocating in trucks, drowning at sea, or perishing in the desert; to the alienation and lack of recognition they are forced to live with once they are here. Some fall victim to traffickers, especially women who are forced into prostitution in a modern form of sex slavery, or prey to unscrupulous employers.

Getting the balance right between clamping down on illegal immigration and welcoming those migrants we need for our economic and social well-being is essential. And we should not miss our target here – we need to be fighting those who organise illegal immigration, not the migrants themselves.

In the last few years we have developed a clearer understanding of migration, and of the policy we should implement. We need to move away from an approach which aims to reduce migratory pressures on the EU by keeping migrants out. Given the current imbalance between rich, democratic and stable European states

with ageing populations, and poorer, less stable states with young and fast growing populations, that is neither tenable, nor desirable.

What we need is a more nuanced approach, better suited to our needs. Fortress Europe is not an option. We need effective and balanced migration management.

There is another side to the migration issue, the link to development. Much has been written about maximising the benefits of migration for the countries of origin. It is inevitable and understandable that many who see no future at home will wish to try their luck abroad. But migration can also cause challenges for the countries migrants leave behind. They may be losing their brightest and best, at a time when they need all the help they can get. So how can we mitigate the harm and maximise the benefit of migration, without trying to work against the tide?

On Thursday the European Commission is adopting a new thematic programme on migration. This confirms our move to a policy more in keeping with today's world. It takes us away from "more development for less migration" to "better managing migration for more development".

It brings together five strands:

- 1) ensuring migration contributes to development, for example by mitigating brain drain and facilitating remittances;
- 2) promoting migration to face the EU's demographic, social and economic challenges, for example in areas where the EU faces labour and skills shortages;
- 3) fighting illegal immigration, for example through border management and signing readmission agreements;
- 4) protecting migrants against exploitation and exclusion, for example targeting networks of traffickers; and

- 5) promoting international protection for asylum seekers and ensuring respect of migrants' rights.

What is clear is that we cannot implement this approach by talking amongst ourselves. Migration cannot be dealt with as a purely internal issue. The external relations component is essential. I like to compare migration management to river management –picture a river and you can easily see why the different countries along its banks, upstream and downstream need to work together to protect their common interests. Similarly an efficient migration policy can only be developed by the countries of origin, transit and destination working together. Managing migration is a shared responsibility.

The European Union has been working on migration issues around the world for the last few years. Indeed, it's one of the strategic priorities in our external relations. But in line with our new, more nuanced approach to migration we are stepping up our activities.

We have put migration on the agenda of political, economic and social dialogues with many non-member states. In Asia, Africa, Latin America and beyond we discuss with our partners our common issues, and implement projects designed to address our concerns.

But we give a particular emphasis to our neighbourhood. Our neighbours were formerly our major sources of migration, but are now more frequently transit or even destination countries. The fact that we face the same challenges now gives us a unique opportunity to understand each others' perspective and cooperate more efficiently, accepting our shared responsibility for the issues.

Our framework for cooperation with our neighbours to the east and south is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). ENP is a new departure for the EU. It is a policy designed to bring

neighbouring countries interested in deeper relations with the EU closer to us. And to promote an area of stability, prosperity, and security for us all.

The EU offers neighbouring countries the opportunity to deepen their political cooperation and their economic integration with us – through inclusion in internal EU programmes and access to the biggest Single Market in the world - in return for working together on issues of mutual concern.

Action Plans are the European Neighbourhood Policy's principal tool. We have signed them with seven partners (Israel, Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Ukraine) and five more are in preparation (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Georgia and Lebanon). Each Action Plan is specifically tailored to the country concerned. It sets out our mutually agreed vision for our relationship and detailed commitments for us both for a three year period.

Migration plays a more and more central role with our neighbours, so is one of the major issues in the Action Plans. We look at the whole range of migration-related issues in keeping with our new, more coherent approach.

Just as the issues vary from country to country, so do the measures listed in the Action Plans. We have adopted a comprehensive and balanced approach, managing legal immigration while preventing and fighting illegal immigration, smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

We have increased the intensity of our dialogue on migration, particularly with our southern neighbours. Beyond our regular bilateral dialogues with Morocco and Tunisia, which we hope to extend to Algeria, Libya, and Egypt, the coming year will provide a number of opportunities for regional and multilateral discussions. There will be a EuroMed Ministerial conference on migration, and a conference in Vienna in May on migration,

stability and security. And we will also hold a conference with both ENP and Sub-Saharan African countries in Rabat, as a first step towards an integrated dialogue between countries of origin, transit and destination.

Throughout our neighbourhood we are funding projects to strengthen institutional capacities; improve border controls; upgrade reception facilities for asylum applicants and refugees; and fight illegal immigration and people trafficking.

We are also helping to build institutions that enforce the rule of law and promote respect for human rights. This is a key element for implementing commitments on institutional and practical protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. In Algeria, for example, we are training police forces in the management of migratory flows, including the requirements of international conventions for refugee protection.

We will step up our efforts to promote a better management of legal migration. People planning to emigrate need to be encouraged to come legally. They need advice and practical help, while those returning to their country of origin may need support for their reintegration. In Morocco we are funding the creation of an international section in the National Agency for Employment.

Ensuring that migrants are well-integrated into the labour market reduces the possibility of employers or organised crime exploiting migrants or their remittances and facilitates their reintegration into their home work force on their return.

We are also tackling illegal immigration head-on by assisting our neighbours to improve their migration management, enhance document security, and increase border control capacity. In Moldova we started an €8 million border assistance mission which will provide on the job training and advice to Moldovan and Ukrainian officials. It will reinforce their

capacity to carry out effective border and customs controls and border surveillance to reduce the risk of trafficking of people as well as smuggling and other criminal activity.

We are negotiating readmission agreements with several of our neighbours, including Morocco and Ukraine, where it is being negotiated in parallel with discussions on visa facilitation.

Asylum-related issues have also risen in priority in recent years. The EU shares UNHCR's view that solutions to refugee problems should be found first and foremost in regions of origin. These countries often lack the institutional and financial capacity to address these challenges alone. So we aim to enhance their capacity to offer effective protection and durable solutions, through asylum capacity-building, local integration, repatriation and resettlement. We also aim to bolster the international protection regime, by supporting pilot Regional Protection Programmes.

Overall, we have committed ourselves to stepping up the volume of our assistance to our neighbours on migration and asylum. We have discussed with EU member states increasing expenditure of up to 3% of the budget of the European Neighbourhood financial instrument and our other instruments for external cooperation. Depending, of course, on increased funds being available for external relations in the next budget period.

Future tasks, in line with the strategy laid out in our Thematic Programme, will include developing safer, easier and cheaper channels for remittances and encouraging development-oriented investment; tackling the brain drain by facilitating the reintegration of migrants wishing to keep their links to their country of origin; providing pre-departure training for legal migrants wishing to emigrate; and encouraging contribution from diasporas to the development of their country of origin – a phenomenon we saw with the Kashmir earthquake.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you can see, we have a full and active agenda ahead of us. We are fully committed to implementing the new approach to migration issues through the ENP, other geographic instruments and the thematic programme on migration and asylum which the Commission will adopt on Thursday.

There is an obvious added value to dealing with migration at the EU level, since unilateral solutions are clearly ineffectual. This gives us a unique opportunity to take the lead on an issue which is highly sensitive to European public opinion and where our member states recognise the need for joint action.

There are two challenges however. First, we need to be more courageous in explaining to our publics the true nature of migration and its impact. Second, we need to ensure we have enough funds to dedicate to our migration programmes to make them meaningful.

The Commission is ready to play its role in meeting these two challenges, but it will take everyone's best efforts to make an impact. So I call on everyone present to play a part in working for a more rational, balanced migration policy which benefits us all.

Thank you.