

IOM Council, International Dialogue on Migration: ‘Valuing Migration’. The Year in Review, 1 December 2004

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

On behalf of Rita Verdonk, the Dutch Minister for Immigration and Integration, I would like to thank you for the invitation to participate in today’s panel discussion, ‘The Year in Review’. Much to her regret, preparations for the Justice and Home Affairs Council that will take place tomorrow and the day after have prevented Ms Verdonk from taking part in this discussion in person.

Nonetheless, I am delighted to have this opportunity to look back with you on the past year. I do so from the perspective of the Dutch Presidency of the European Union. And although the year has not yet ended – there is still one month left of our Presidency – we can already say that a lot has been achieved in the field of migration.

The Dutch government made migration one of the priorities of its Presidency. There is an obvious need for governments all over the world to manage and regulate migration flows. Firstly, for security purposes. The link between the safe and controlled movement of individuals and security is beyond doubt. But there is more. We cannot maintain our protection policy under the 1951 Geneva Convention if we do not regulate migration and conduct effective return procedures. If we want to avoid such practices as asylum shopping, if we want an effective re-admission policy, we must have clear and common procedures. To make progress in this field, we have had to take a step forward and develop a new perspective in the form of a new vision for the future.

As you will have read in The Year in Review, the IOM also recognises the importance of finding common ground and complementary objectives at national, regional and global levels in order to manage migration cooperatively. By definition, migration is an international issue. So there is good reason to find common international ground. The importance of this can be seen in several areas. Firstly, we must incorporate migration issues into our foreign policies. Secondly, we must invest in international forums and relevant organisations, and create common European policies and harmonisation procedures. The EU did not start harmonising national approaches to migration policy and legislation this year. But further harmonisation has definitely been advanced by the European Council's adoption last month of a new multi-annual programme on freedom, security and justice. We are pleased the Dutch Presidency has contributed to this ambition of harmonisation.

Today, I would like to talk about the content of this multi-annual programme, also known as *The Hague Programme*. I will not deal with all the topics it covers, but will focus specifically on issues that I think are of interest to the IOM and its Member States. Let me start by providing you with a little background information.

Background

We tend to forget that it was only five years ago – in Tampere, Finland – that the European Council agreed upon a programme which laid the foundations for an area of freedom, security and justice.

The EU should be proud that it has achieved so much since then. In the context of The Hague Programme, I would like to mention that the EU since 'Tampere'

agreed on the principles for a common asylum and immigration policy and prepared the way to harmonise border controls.

In the run-up to our Presidency, we felt the time was ripe for a new multi-annual programme. But we also realised we would have to cross two bridges. The first was the legislative programme of the Treaty of Amsterdam. It was uncertain whether agreement could be reached on minimum standards for asylum and migration. The second uncertainty was the ongoing negotiation of the draft Constitutional Treaty for Europe.

Both bridges were crossed and developments took a positive turn. The signing of the Constitutional Treaty on 29 October 2004 paved the way for a new multi-annual programme to strengthen the common area of freedom, security and justice and enable the Union to meet future challenges by building on the achievements since Tampere.

Public support is one of the most critical success factors for any policy development, especially in the sensitive field of migration. And it is worth mentioning that the Hague Programme was not the sole preserve of politicians and civil servants in the European Commission, the Member States and the European Parliament. The Dutch government sought added value by involving international and non-governmental organisations and society at large in the debate. All relevant players were consulted during the preparatory phase. The Hague Programme recognises the importance of open lines of communication with society at large and the European Council also encourages the Union's institutions to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society.

The European Council of 4 and 5 November

After extensive preparation, the multi-annual programme was adopted by the European Council on 5 November.

The Hague Programme's objective is to improve the common capability of the Union and its Member States to guarantee fundamental rights, minimum procedural safeguards and access to justice. It also seeks to improve the common capability to protect persons in need in accordance with international treaties, and the capability to regulate migration flows and control the Union's external borders.

Since the Hague Programme considers all aspects of policy relating to the area of freedom, security and justice, it also addresses such challenges as the fight against organised cross-border crime and terrorism, and justice and police cooperation.

Current issues and trends, such as irregular migration and the economic aspects of migration and migrants, also feature prominently in the Hague Programme.

The Hague Programme

Let me highlight a few elements of the Hague Programme that might interest you.

A common European asylum system

The second phase in the development of a common policy on asylum, migration and borders started on 1 May 2004. The Hague Programme aims to adopt a common European asylum system before the end of 2010.

Integration

The Hague Programme also considers the integration of immigrants. It is widely acknowledged that integration is crucial to achieve the full participation of migrants in society and to guarantee stability and social cohesion. The European Union has underlined the need for greater coordination between national integration policies and EU initiatives in this field.

Legal migration and the fight against illegal employment

As The Year in Review highlights, one of the main issues in international mobility is labour migration. I expect my colleague from the ILO will consider this in more detail.

The EU also recognises the importance of a common approach to address developments in this field. The European Council has invited the European Commission to present a policy plan on legal migration before the end of 2005. One of the areas covered by the policy plan will be admission procedures that respond promptly to fluctuating demand for migrant labour.

The external dimension of asylum and migration

During its preparations for the EU Presidency, the Netherlands emphasised the importance of international protection and the need for cooperation in this field with third countries. The essence of this cooperation is to improve durable protection in regions that are near to conflict areas. Such protection will stop refugees from turning to smugglers, help countries in the region deal with the influx of refugees and ensure that available funds are spent efficiently.

The European Council of 4 and 5 November decided to develop EU Regional Protection Programmes in partnership with third countries and in close consultation and cooperation with UNHCR.

Many countries in the proximity of the EU are confronted with mass movements of people transiting to the EU. With regard to these countries of transit, the need for intensified cooperation and capacity building, on both the southern and eastern borders of the EU, has been stressed. The EU is ready to help these countries improve their management of migration and provide effective protection for refugees.

You are probably aware that the Netherlands, like many other countries, is concerned about the effectiveness of return policies. Only the effective return of illegal migrants and failed asylum seekers can guarantee the integrity of our migration policies. A removal and repatriation policy has therefore been agreed, based on common standards. These include closer cooperation and technical assistance, the establishment of a European Return Fund by 2007 and the appointment of a Special Representative for a common readmission policy.

Management and migration flows

The Hague Programme highlights the importance of the swift abolition of internal border controls, and stronger controls and surveillance of the Union's external borders. The Programme also recognises the need to strengthen the integrated management system for external borders.

A great effort has been made to bring the Member States together in a European Border Agency. It has not been in vain: the European Border Agency will be established on 1 May 2005, to coordinate operational cooperation at the external borders. In this context, teams of national experts will be set up to provide rapid

technical and operational assistance to Member States. A Community border management fund will also be established by the end of 2006.

In the context of managing migration flows, we must also look at the continuing growth in human trafficking. As noted in the IOM document, recent figures indicate that between 600,000 and 800,000 people worldwide are victims of human trafficking every year. These figures reflect a humanitarian crisis that has an enormous impact on individuals and their social environment. Inter-state cooperation is necessary to alleviate the human suffering caused by people trafficking and smuggling. This issue will rightly continue to receive the attention it deserves. The European Commission has been asked to draw up a plan in 2005 to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings.

The management of migration flows can also be improved by security measures that link visa application procedures to entry and exit procedures. We need harmonised solutions and a coherent approach to biometric identifiers and data. This is the only way to ensure the effective identification of those who cross borders illegally and those who violate legislation and regulations. Therefore it will be examined how we can maximise the effectiveness and interoperability of EU information systems, including the Schengen Information System, the Visa Information System and EURODAC.

At the same time, current efforts to include biometric identifiers in travel documents, visas, residence permits and information systems will be continued. Preparations will also be made to develop minimum standards for national identity cards.

To conclude this long list of measures and action points, I would like to mention a final element of the Hague Programme that might interest you: the intention to

establish common visa offices. I realise that this is a long-term ambition but it may help us harmonise our migration policies even further.

Conclusion

As I said in my introduction, our Presidency has not yet ended. Another Justice and Home Affairs Council will be held tomorrow and the day after. Its agenda will include best practices on return policy and the fight against illegal migration across the maritime borders of the EU and its Member States.

We hope to make progress on several other fronts, but with the comprehensive plan in the new multi-annual programme, Europe can already claim that it has taken a giant step forward, that will have direct implications for policies, regulation and concrete action. This step is relevant in our common effort to manage migration and hopefully it will serve as an example to others, because the common management of migration is one of the challenges facing the international community as a whole. We must give this issue the attention it deserves. Migration management may well prove to be the most relevant factor in the prevention of social tensions within communities and may therefore be one of the most politically important issues in the years to come.

Epilogue

In the years to come the Netherlands will try to contribute to the ongoing European and international efforts to harmonise national approaches to migration policy and legislation.

As has been stressed in the document “Year in Review”, migration and development can no longer be dealt with as separate policy areas. Issues like brain drain from developing countries, the influence of remittances and the impact of immigration for developed countries should be dealt with in an

integrated manner. The goal of our national policy document on Migration and Development therefore is, to come to an integrated foreign policy in the field of migration and development, by determining under which circumstances these policy areas can strengthen one other and in which cases coherency asks for policy adjustments.

Tomorrow I will consider this national policy document on migration and development in more detail.

Thank you