

Vice-president Franco FRATTINI

European Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security

**“Migration and development:
challenges and opportunities”**

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Conference on Migration and Development

Brussels, 16 March 2006

This Conference is now coming to an end after two days of fruitful discussions. I would like to thank our Belgian hosts for taking this initiative and the IOM for contributing so much to its success. I am also glad that the Commission, together with the World Bank, was able to support this important undertaking.

The Conference took place at a crucial point in time. The issues related to the links between migration and development are now at the top of the international policy agenda, as was exemplified by the report from the Global Commission on International Migration, to which I would like to pay tribute; I believe that the debate on these issues shall continue among all stakeholders.

I would like to focus my comments on two sets of issues which I view as particularly important in the perspective of this global debate.

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First issue: how can countries of origin, transit and destination work together to make migration work for all concerned, and first of all for the migrants and their families?

For the European Commission, this is a central issue, and it is at the heart of the concept of shared responsibility which we have been developing with our partners in the developing world.

I wish to highlight in this respect the partnership which the EU is developing with a number of countries in Africa. Migration, it is well known, presents both challenges and opportunities. How to make sure that for instance a young student from Ghana does not become a victim of traffickers and comes safely to Europe to pursue its studies and then return back home to set up a dentist studio? A true challenge and opportunity! Tackling these challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities is what our partnership is about.

Africa, in its broadest sense, has been one of the main focal points of the discussions during this conference, and rightly so, because it is disproportionately affected by some of the more negative aspects of migration. Examples include brain drain, illegal migration, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings

At the same time, the potentially positive impacts of migration are very hard to feel in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example because of the cost and difficulties involved in transferring remittances to these countries, or because of the practical difficulties faced by many African migrants to contribute to the development of their countries of origin

The Commission believes that well designed and managed policies can make a difference. During this conference examples of good practices in this area have been presented. However, we must do more to enhance the contribution of migration to development in Africa and in other parts of the developing world.

The Commission is now engaging in a comprehensive dialogue on migration-related issues, both with the African Union and with individual, interested countries. This will involve issues as varied as:

- joining efforts to fight trafficking in human beings (an issue that has already been the subject of discussions between the EU and the African Union);
- supporting African countries' efforts to better manage migration flows.

- supporting the development of asylum systems in Africa and the generous efforts made by those countries that host large refugee populations – this is the essence of the Regional Protection Programmes (RPPs) which the EU is developing in partnership with UNHCR;
- and helping countries of origin of migrants in Africa capitalise on the benefits of remittances and tap into the skills that are available within the African diasporas.

The development of dialogue with the countries of origin and transit will in particular be the central topic of an EU-Africa Conference on migration that will be held later this year in Morocco. This is all the more relevant because the distinction between countries of origin, transit and destination is becoming blurred: Morocco, traditionally a country of origin, is at the same time becoming a country of transit and even of destination; and many countries in sub-Saharan Africa increasingly share these three characters as well.

At the same time, policies must recognise and address the broader causes of migration flows, such as poverty, lack of opportunities, environmental degradation, insecurity and conflict; these are all issues which EU development policy seeks to address, and further efforts in this direction will be made in future.

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The second set of issues which the Commission believes should be at the centre of this debate are those that were addressed in the Commission's Communication on Migration and Development of last September. These orientations cover very practical issues that offer a strong potential for win-win outcomes. And this shall be our goal!

The debates during these two days have shown for instance that examples exist of policies that have allowed the costs of remittance flows to come down significantly, or that can make it easier to use remittances for investment or other development-friendly uses, while respecting their private nature. It is a significant contribution to the countries' own efforts to achieve economic and social development, as well as to the EU's development aid.

. The Commission has already taken an important initiative in the area of remittances On 1 December we approved a proposal for a Directive on payment services, which will create a harmonised framework in particular for remittance services. This should increase competition and thus contribute to a decrease in costs.

At the same time, the new framework will increase transparency by forcing service providers to disclose information on costs, including the exchange rates used, and the time needed to complete the transfer.

However, further steps are necessary.

- First, efforts must be made to improve our knowledge of remittance flows. Here we must look at synergies with other actors, for example the World Bank which also co-sponsored this event and whose recently published 'Global Economic Prospects' represent a major contribution to the debate on remittances and development.
- Second, the EU is also making financial assistance available, for example in the framework of the Commission's Aeneas programme, to develop innovative solutions to facilitate remittance flows and to make them work for development. The promising project that was presented today by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is actually funded by Aeneas.

- Third, it is engaging EU financial institutions by encouraging them to become more active in what is effectively a very promising market. Although here we have to be vigilant so that the private financial services do not exploit the disadvantageous banking situation of migrant workers.

However, remittances are not the only area where important EU initiatives are underway or being considered.

The Commission is for example willing to help developing countries reach out to their diaspora, whose skills can be an important asset for development. It is here that we are awaiting ideas from those concerned as a part of the large dialogue I mentioned before.

The Commission is also actively involved in the debate about how to ensure that our migration policies do not lead to brain drain, as emphasised in the recent Commission Communication on the human resource crisis in the healthcare sector of developing countries. Rather we should aim for brain circulation.

Let me turn briefly to another important initiative, the Policy Plan on legal migration that we adopted recently. This important document constitutes an effective workplan for the EU's policy over the next few years, in particular in all areas related to legal migration.

It foresees in particular various initiatives to establish procedures for the admission to the EU of various categories of migrants, both skilled and unskilled, recognising that the EU will continue to need migrants in future if it is to maintain its economic and social model and increase the pool of available skills.

At the same time, the policy plan foresees innovative forms of cooperation with countries of origin of migrants, for example by supporting the training in these countries of people wishing to migrate to the EU, helping them to adjust to the needs of ever-changing labour markets.

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Finally, I am glad first, that we have been increasingly focusing on the development dimension of the migration issues and secondly, that this topic is more and more becoming a global concern. This is why I would like to see the results of this Conference to feed into the global debate on migration and development, and in particular in the discussions that will take place in New York in September.

The Commission is determined to contribute actively to this High Level Dialogue on Migration and is ready to share its experience with other participants.

In my view, it would be very useful if the Dialogue focuses as much as possible on practical, concrete issues with a win-win potential, such as the ones I have mentioned in this address. It could also result in the establishment of regular exchanges of views and experiences. Were this to be the case, the EU is ready to participate actively in such exchanges, on the basis of the innovative policies which it is developing.

Whatever form of cooperation we chose, it is fundamental that we, the countries of destination, the countries of origin and transition, do work together and that the resolving concrete issues is our common goal.

Thank you for your attention.