

**“Promotion of tolerance and respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity”  
Progressive Governance Network for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - Athens, 19.3.2001**

**I**  
General thoughts

1. Globalization could appear to pose a threat to diversity, through its homogenization of communication models and practices (imposition of a single language, of common codes of practice and therefore adoption of common models to the detriment of the special characteristics of each culture). The relation “diversity against globalization” should be changed especially according to the argument that communication may only be creative when it interconnects what is different, when it serves as a bridge between those who have developed distinctive identities and ways of life. Therefore, preserving the differences is a precondition for a society that is breaking free from the bonds of ethnic, economic, technological or political isolationism and is promoting communication in all levels. Communication in the frame of a dull uniformity would only lead to a mechanistic society, in which personal autonomy would no longer have a place.

2. This observation leads to the following conclusion: while in the past diversity was the direct outcome of isolationism, and therefore, a given element of social formations, today it is a dedicated policy target, it will exist only if we desire it. It is not to be taken for granted. It will indeed exist only as the object of progressive politics that focus on personal and collective autonomy. Neoliberal or conservative politics, on the other hand, are better suited by the depressing uniformity of homo economicus, without any intermediation of specific cultural models.

3. Globalization poses a challenge to diversity partly because it constitutes an uncoordinated process powered by market dynamics. Regional integration, on the other hand, is a political phenomenon consciously planned and controlled mainly by political processes and may serve as a positive factor for the preservation of diversity.

4. We should also take into consideration two positive and one negative element of globalization and proceed accordingly. The positive elements are: a) the tendency to

reinforce decentralized initiatives at local level which is in anyway favoured by new technologies, and ultimately encourages diversity and, b) the facile incorporation of elements of different cultures (e.g. music etc) due to the possibility of accessing a great volume of information enabled by modern technology. On the opposite side, there is the negative element of facile conversion of the different culture into simple “fashion”. Ethnic fashions, nevertheless, even if they cannot fully establish a multicultural society, do familiarize with something that is “different”.

5. Another danger to be taken into account is the creation of circumstances of isolation due to the collective claim of the right to diversity. Placing claims collectively and not simply personally is natural, as this is the only way that someone may expect results, when faced with a dominant culture. This practice however, should be prevented from leading to distinctive “ghettos” which essentially reproduce isolationism.

## II

### Encouraging the respect of diversity

#### *1. Regional integration and diversity*

We should examine under which circumstances could several forms of regional integration (e.g. the European Union) operate as factors favoring diversity within the globalized environment. Citizenship tends, however, to surpass the state’s boundaries, include immigrants and acquire new dimensions.

#### *2. Cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism*

i. Respect for diverse cultures is already recognized as a principle in international treaties (e.g. Treaty of Amsterdam). We should integrate and define further this principle by national legislation and by taking action in society and economy in order to bend inequality and to create circumstances of equal opportunities.

ii. We should form criteria and take actions in a way that diversity could not lead to isolationism. Diversity should serve communication in the frame of a common

cohabitation space. It is clear enough though, that, for example, racist, fascist or any similar cultural models should be explicitly excluded.

iii. Our guideline for guaranteeing diversity should be the guarantee of equality with a specifically defined context. Therefore, we are called upon to guarantee equal opportunities. We should especially guarantee equality of access for every person that happens to live in our societies and to all of the society's major functions. At this point we come across an obvious difficulty regarding the extent of guaranteeing civil rights. Thus, the question is: will we guarantee equality in a general context without preserving some areas only for the citizens of our states? We should therefore, examine the prospect of widening civil rights, especially at local government level but also, under certain conditions at the state level or, where they are established, at the level of supranational unions.

iv. The encouragement of diversity concerns many sectors, like employment, education, residence, health and culture. In order to avoid differentiation of approach in each sector, we should seek strategies and policies that bend the differences and promote communication within a common cohabitation space.

- Diversity in employment should be regarded as a tool for improving employment and for decreasing unemployment. Necessary for that purpose is the support of social parties and the state. Our efforts should also focus to the position of women in society and in labor market and to the elimination of any discriminatory behavior based on sex, gender or nationality, according to the special needs of each individual.

- In education we should promote educational programs for cultural diversity awareness and deliver them to multicultural children audiences. The development of policies for the promotion of diversity should also favor learning of more than one foreign languages, student exchanges at earlier stages of education and learning the history of other countries.

v. The encouragement of cosmopolitanism should associate diversity with personal autonomy. Actions need, therefore, to be connected with NGOs that are especially active in the field of human rights and to avoid engagement with associations, organizations etc that promote cultural "supremacy" and lead to isolationism.



vi. With the cooperation of NGOs we will be able to observe better what exactly is going on in every day life and to appreciate the consequences of administration actions on several social groups. Equally important is the deliberation with these groups in order to understand how they perceive the issue each time.

vii. In this framework, the independent National Committees for Human Rights should, take initiatives by monitoring the right application of the relative measures and of the actions taken. The Committees could also support any social group especially when there is a discrimination issue.

viii. We should seek the appropriate mechanisms that deal with diversity in a manner that, the different social groups will not feel marginal. Only when people have common experiences they feel as part of the same cultural group. Thus, it is crucial to formulate affirmative action programs to encourage multicultural participation in the most important social functions.

ix. We should make clear to the people of our countries that diversity is a positive element that, with the right approach, leads to development and well being for all. That, it is not the cause of 'troubles' like criminality and insecurity and it has not as a consequence uncertainty in everyone's field of activities. This fact is evident in statistics but it also has to be acknowledged by the people with the right information since, usually, misunderstandings arise when we are not familiar with other cultures.

x. The course we will follow should also underline that, the rights being recognized increase personal freedom, complement and do not suppress the rights of the others (citizens, or groups, or indigenous people). Moreover, the initiatives and actions chosen should take into account the possible tensions between the migration currents themselves.

### *3. Ethnic and Religious diversity*

i. In order to strengthen the respect for ethnic and religious diversity, first we need to check national legislation and purge all vestiges of ethnic and religious isolationism. Initiatives also need to be taken, particularly in cooperation with NGOs, for discussion and development of common action in sensitive social fields by representatives of all known religions and dogmas.

ii. Religious diversity is sometimes connected with the practices of closed groups that operate with insufficient respect for the autonomy of their members. Therefore, we should discourage extreme expressions of “fundamentalist” inspiration by the appropriate reform of the manner in which religion is taught at schools, by insisting upon associating religious freedom with other fundamental rights and democracy.

iii. Finally, it is useful to examine how could the common characteristics of the various faiths be highlighted in aid the realization that, independently of the differences there is a common underlying theme, which ultimately points towards tolerance.

#### *4. Migration policies*

i. One of the most apparent aspects of globalization is the swelling of the migration currents internationally. Migration, at the scale experienced in many countries recently, has important repercussions on the economy and the society of both destination (host) and source countries. Migration influences a country’s growth while it is linked in complex ways with phenomena such as flows of remittances, spread of know-how and direct investment. Yet, it may prove disruptive for host countries.

ii. The basic question is how to draft policies that maximize benefits and cushion the short to medium term adjustment problems. The issues that arise are:

- How can the management of migration flows help the economic and social development of source countries?
- To what extent could migration be integrated as an aspect in overall regional development?
- Could the formalization of the legal status of immigrant workers have a positive impact on their economic contribution and reduce the influence of illegal processes?
- Is there a role for bilateral or multilateral initiatives to influence the flows of migrants and to ensure positive outcomes?
- Are there policies, which can favor the growth-enhancing effects of immigration and limit any transitional negative impacts on the labor market?

iii. The drafting of any policy should include accompanying measures of adjustment, in order for new coming immigrants to familiarize easily with the habits and the customs of host countries, while in the same time the citizens of those countries are

educated for the acceptance of immigrants. It is therefore, obvious the need for providing the appropriate education to immigrants in order for them to adopt the new values of the host country. Moreover, education is the only way which will allow them to socially integrate or to progress in employment. At the same time, immigrants may with their work ameliorate their place in society, serving also the needs of the labor market.

iv. The important issue for Europe is to define the conditions by which it will accept workers in order to maintain a balance of the migration burden. We should mention the close relation between migration and demographic developments and the need to formulate a policy of attracting specialist immigrants. We must also make proposals for dealing with any eventual competition between our countries for these specialist immigrants.

v. Apart from the policy of the European Union for immigrants, we must focus at the causes that provoke and stress the migration flows. It should be useful therefore, to make first an analysis of the causes of these problems, such as the impact of the international trade agreements of the WTO to the source countries, before we conclude to any stance or proposal. On the other hand, we should seek ways for dealing with the problem, not only with provisions relevant to the reception of immigrants but also with policies which encourage their employment in the source countries in order to remain there.

vi. In some areas of employment the employees do not have to relocate. The employee may remain where he his offer his services to an internationalized undertaking which in its turn will exploit the work product on the spot. These practices are not that developed in Europe but in the future they may function avoiding any transfer of the employee who provides services from the place where he is located.

vii. The issue of connecting migration with growth and the demographic question must be seen as a close system where the well being of the side which receives working force must be leveled by and complemented with the well being of the side that provides it. Working force, capital and know-how flows should be extended and work both ways. If the assimilation is so strong that the contact of migrants with their birth countries is suspended then we block a significant path of capital and know-how transfer to the developing countries, making the solution of the problem even more difficult.



viii. At the European Union level, the migration policy should be the outcome of community and national policy. It should take into account the difficulties of the issue both at European Union level and at state level, so as for migration policy not to be segmented in different national policies. European legislation should provide the framework without imposing strictly defined rules in each country. Each country should therefore, have the possibility to be flexible avoiding distortions.

ix. While there is still time we should seek at least general choices for a common migration policy. Tomorrow it will be too late, since unilateral solutions will be inconvenient. When the demographic explosion at non European countries becomes gigantic and knocks more intensely Europe's door, it is certain that there will be no more choices. The eurocentric approach of the problem is therefore of no use. Our examination should extend beyond the borders of the European Union.

x. The enlargement of the European Union poses, in its turn, the question of flows from the countries of eastern Europe. A reasonable way of dealing with the issue would be to accept the possibility of migration by the time of application of the community *aquis* regarding the free movement of workers. In the medium and long term the candidate countries are in danger to acquire a demographic problem by the expected reduction of working force.

xi. An equally important problem is the way asylum seekers *slide* to the category of migrants, because by this practice the institution of asylum is falsified. We should make efforts in order to clearly distinct those two categories.

xii. Some of the legal provisions do improve the reception and living conditions of immigrants in their new social environment. Making it easy to acquire the citizenship, especially for those who live with their families in the host country or those who are second generation immigrants, could be an essential choice, as is also the right to family reunion and the protection of the woman immigrant.

xiii. It would be welcomed to adopt charters of immigrants' rights. Moreover, there is the need to guarantee a minimum of social and citizens' rights for the legal immigrants, such as their quota participation in workers' unions and the recognition of citizens' rights for them at the local government.

xiv. We should not be strict in providing visas even to the seasonal workers. The future is connected with the regular movement of immigrants and that is a fact that has to be taken into account by the governments of the states.

xv. Immigrants' social security rights are of special importance amongst the specific migration policies. Social security rights are frequently not portable in the case of return. We should therefore examine the possibility of transfer of these rights in order to avoid discrimination and further implications.

xvi. Labor legislation needs also to be revised as it is sometimes used as an exclusion device, while the lack of labor standards is frequently the reason for employers to engage immigrant labour.

xvii. Finally, housing is a critical area for immigrants, which frequently creates discriminations. The ghettos are for all of us the most characteristic image of the migration problem in the developed societies. To guarantee basic and decent living conditions and housing is a priority and a humanitarian duty for the host countries.

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