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"HUMAN RIGHTS IN MIGRANT COMMUNITIES"

"Europe's treatment of its many diverse migrant communities will be as significant an index of its capacity for decent survival as will its response to the economic difficulties which so directly threaten its well-being at the present time. Our society is experiencing a period of headlong change. We know that new technologies are transforming the way we live, and we are trying to adapt in time. Do we also know that another mechanism of change, a mechanism of migration and demography, is transforming our society in a similarly fundamental way, by creating in many of the great European cities a multi-racial population? And are we prepared to adapt to that transformation, which is as dramatic in its way as the change wrought by new technology?

....Of the 12,5 million migrants (workers and families) in the Community of 10 countries, some 9 million come from outside the EC. Turks, Yugoslavs, Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians form the biggest national groups, to which can be added over 1,5 million Spaniards and Portuguese. When we become a Community of 12 countries, the effect will be to change the percentage of Community migrants from a quarter of the total to well over a third. After the accession of Spain and Portugal some 5 million migrants will be of Community origin....

....While we recognise that migrants from Member States have a special status under the Treaties, the Commission believes that the creation of too great a distinction in policy terms between Community and non-Community migrants would be a serious mistake. Many of the problems they face are the same, especially in relation to discrimination and racial prejudice, and, since the thrust of our policy is to encourage greater integration, we must necessarily address the difficulties faced by all migrants regardless of their origin.....

....Whilst things remain to be done for Community citizens, the really pressing problem is the non-Community migrant population. First of all we are greatly concerned at the re-emergence of racism and xenophobia. Unfortunately, both national Parliaments and the European Parliament contain a vocal minority of democratically elected representatives who are taking an increasingly racist line on migration matters. A climate of unemployment and uncertainty fuels the fears which lead to this racism. But we must also face the fact that these elected representatives do voice opinions and views held by some sections of our society.

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What will the Commission do about it? First we shall continue to pronounce against it, from wherever it arises, on all public occasions such as this. Our guide-lines are clear. We intend to press, at Community level, for the adoption of a declaration on the fight against racism and xenophobia, along the lines of the Inter-Institutional Joint Declaration on Fundamental Rights. Further, we shall hope to back this by proposals for experimental schemes for free legal assistance to enable migrants to defend their rights, before the Courts if necessary. We shall also endeavour to bring the migrant population together, to allow better collective expression of their concerns. But legislation, however important, will not achieve everything. What is also required is that all of us engaged in public debate do our utmost to maintain a climate of opinion which is inhospitable to racist utterances. We must also seek to generate a public sensitivity to the issue....

....Secondly, I believe that we shall have to deal with the matter of civil and political rights. The focus must be, for all migrants, upon the right of assembly, publication and expression of political views, and protection against unjustified expulsion on account of the exercise of these freedoms. This is a very delicate area, in which aspects of public order and security must also have a say. After the achievement of these essential preliminary rights, the first important measure must be the grant of the right to vote at local level, as a first step, for all migrants legally resident in the European Community.....

....Since the onset in 1974 of the current economic difficulties, there has been a return to their countries of origin by some half million of non-Community migrants. This figure is not as high as might have been expected, and has been more than compensated for by family re-unification and demographic factors. Today the 12,5 million migrant population has plateaued, and is slightly higher than the figure for 1974 (12 millions)....

....It is clear that the many immigrant workers and their families are not going to leave in any significant number and nor should we want them to. We must remember that most of these people came to Europe at our invitation and have contributed substantially to our economic well being. Common decency requires that they cannot be abandoned when times become difficult and it is, therefore, a fact of life that the future European society will be multi-racial in the fullest sense of the word with substantial communities of non-European origin. This will be so not least because the birth rate amongst the migrant communities is significantly higher than the European average (which has been declining in recent years). This development will have many positive aspects. We have only to look to the American example to see the benefits which can flow from a melting pot of different cultures: receptivity to new ideas, a freshness of outlook, a new enthusiasm and sense of potential. All of these can result from a healthy climate of racial diversity provided that people open their minds. However, if they approach the issue with closed or bigoted minds, then tensions will mount, as can be seen clearly at the present time. I have to state here very clearly that the policy of the European Commission is totally to oppose any racist thinking which may surface in this context. It is our job to ensure the full social, political and economic integration of these people within our society...."
