

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘Cooperation between civil society organisations and local and regional authorities in integrating immigrants’ (additional opinion)**

(2011/C 318/11)

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On 20 January 2011, the European Economic and Social Committee decided, under Rule 29A of the implementing provisions, to draw up an additional opinion on

*Cooperation between civil society organisations and local and regional authorities in integrating immigrants.*

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 27 June 2011.

At its 473rd plenary session, held on 13 and 14 July 2011 (meeting of 13 July 2011), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 119 votes to 1 with 11 abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

**1.1 The coming years will see an increase in the internal mobility of European citizens and in immigration to Europe by third-country nationals.** These migration processes will enhance the EU’s national, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity<sup>(1)</sup>. The increase in mobility and immigration presents a challenge at local and regional level.

The European Economic and Social Committee condemns the recent actions restricting freedom of movement within the Schengen Area, and drew up an opinion<sup>(2)</sup> with a view to cooperating with the work of the European Council of 24 June.

**1.2** One of the guiding principles of *Europe 2020 – a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* relates to the integration of immigrants. The EESC wishes to point out that economic growth and job creation and improved training and public services facilitate integration.

**1.3** It is very important that the EU has **good common legislation** to ensure that immigration is managed by means of legal and transparent procedures. This common legislation must be based on respect for the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights in order to ensure that immigrants enjoy the same rights and obligations, equal treatment and non-discrimination in work and in society.

**1.4** Against a background of economic and social crisis, **intolerance, xenophobia and racism** are on the rise throughout Europe, **including within the political agendas of certain governments.** The EU Institutions must be extremely active in the fight against xenophobia and discrimi-

nation towards visible minorities and immigrants, promoting equal opportunities and social mobility and cohesion. The media must act responsibly and informatively.

**1.5** Local and regional authorities have political, regulatory and budgetary instruments for implementing integration policies. In many cases, there are national policies aimed at controlling migratory flows, but they remain very distant from the local and regional level, where the challenge of integration has to be faced. Policies have taken various forms: proactive, preventive, corrective and reactive. Local authorities have moved away from the approach which saw integration as a natural process free from difficulties and not requiring active and specific policies.

**1.6 The EESC believes that integration is not a legal act, but rather a complex, long-term social process, with many dimensions and many stakeholders involved, particularly at local level.** The social integration process takes place within society’s structures and in various areas of people’s lives: family, neighbourhood and city, workplace, school, training centre, university, association, place of worship, sports club, etc.

**1.7** The social process of integration must be based on a legislative framework which guarantees ‘bringing immigrants’ rights and duties, as well as access to goods, services and means of civic participation progressively into line with those of the rest of the population, under conditions of equal opportunities and treatment’<sup>(3)</sup>. The first of the Common Basic Principles of the European Union’s integration policy<sup>(4)</sup> states that ‘Integration is a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States’<sup>(5)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 48, 15.2.2011, p. 6.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 248, 25.8.2011, p. 135.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 125, 27.5.2002, p. 112.

<sup>(4)</sup> Council doc. 14615/04. Common Basic Principles adopted by the Council and Representatives of the Member States on 19 November 2004.

<sup>(5)</sup> COM(2005) 389 final. Agenda for Integration - Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union.

1.8 **Integration and social inclusion policies adopted by local and regional authorities should focus on a number of different areas** <sup>(6)</sup>: initial reception; teaching the language, laws and customs; housing; health; combating poverty; combating discrimination; employment and training policies; gender equality; education for children; family policy; youth policy; healthcare; providing social services and facilitating public participation. The staff of public authorities must reflect ethnic and cultural diversity and public employees must be given intercultural training. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation should be promoted at local and regional level.

1.9 **Democratic governance** is based on the principle that all members of the political community should be able to take part directly and indirectly in the governmental decision-making process. If integration policies are to be successful, civil society and local and regional authorities must be actively involved in their drawing up, implementation and evaluation.

1.10 In a democratic society, everybody affected by collective decisions must be able to influence and participate in those decisions. Democracy in the European multicultural cities of the 21st Century must be improved through the participation of residents whose rights of political participation are restricted: residents from third countries <sup>(7)</sup>.

1.11 The EESC has called for **citizenship rights to be extended** to third-country nationals with permanent resident status in the EU <sup>(8)</sup>. It also calls for more flexible national naturalisation policies.

1.12 The EESC can contribute to the implementation of the conclusions of the Zaragoza Conference, by means of an opinion on **active citizenship** indicators.

1.13 The ninth Common Basic Principle, *'The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration'*, has been inadequately implemented in the Member States. The third edition of MIPEX <sup>(9)</sup> (which includes integration indicators for 31 countries of Europe and North America) concludes that most immigrants have few opportunities to inform and improve the policies which affect them daily.

<sup>(6)</sup> OJ C 347, 18.12.2010, p. 19.

<sup>(7)</sup> R. Gropas and R. Zapata-Barrero (2011) *Active immigrants in multicultural contexts: democratic challenges in Europe*, in A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood, and N. Meer *European Multiculturalism(s): Cultural, religious and ethnic challenges*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>(8)</sup> OJ C 208, 3.9.2003, p. 76.

<sup>(9)</sup> Migrant Integration Policy Index III, 2011.

1.14 The EESC believes that proactive integration policies should be implemented, with a two-way focus, targeting both the host societies and immigrants, the purpose being to achieve a society in which all citizens, regardless of where they come from, have the same rights and obligations, and share the values of a democratic, open and pluralist society.

1.15 In European cities, civil society is extremely active and works to improve co-existence and integration. These organisations represent wonderful social capital which can promote inclusive societies in each of its spheres of action. **The EESC proposes that local and regional authorities encourage the activities of civil society and promote its consultation and participation** through public and transparent procedures, and that sufficient funding be provided. Funding systems must not restrict the independence of organisations.

1.16 In order to encourage integration, governance must be improved by means of systems for civil society participation, and the EESC therefore proposes that **the role of existing local and regional participation and consultation bodies be strengthened and that new forums and platforms be created in cities and regions which have yet to establish them**, because public action is more successful when participatory systems are in place.

1.17 **The EESC proposes that Europe's municipal and regional authorities set up consultative councils, forums and platforms** so that civil society (immigrants' organisations and immigrant-support organisations, human rights organisations, women's organisations, social partners – trade unions and employers' organisations – and other relevant NGOs) can participate in and be consulted on integration policies. At municipal level, participatory structures can be adapted to reflect the specific local situation and can have either stable or more flexible structures. Local and regional authorities must take steps to remove the obstacles preventing participation.

1.18 The EESC believes that, **in the new integration agenda**, the European Commission should stress the importance of the local and regional level, promoting cooperation between political authorities and civil society organisations. It is at local level that integration takes place most effectively and a sense of belonging develops. Social and political participation is crucial to creating this sense of belonging.

1.19 The Commission's Communication should propose that structures be created at local level for consultation with immigrants and civil society, and **the European Integration Fund could work with local authorities to fund** these participatory activities, while guaranteeing the independence of organisations.

1.20 In the context of the forthcoming mid-term evaluation, the EESC believes that **the Fund's budget should be increased and that it should have more flexible funding systems for local and regional authorities**. Furthermore, Commission should manage up to 20 % of the Fund, financing EU actions with high added value. The Committee shares the concern of many immigrants' organisations regarding the fact that the Fund only finances projects presented by large organisations with the capacity for high levels of match funding, but does not fund small local organisations.

## 2. Background and general comments

2.1 Through a range of opinions, the EESC has contributed to the establishment of a common EU approach to integration policies: the Common Agenda for Integration, the Common Basic Principles, the European Integration Fund, the ministerial conferences, the Network of National Contact Points, the integration handbooks, annual reports, the website and the creation of the European Integration Forum.

2.2 The **Lisbon Treaty** provided the European Union with a legal basis (Article 79.4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) for implementing measures to **encourage and support the work of the Member States to integrate third-country nationals**.

2.3 In 2006, the EESC adopted an own-initiative report <sup>(10)</sup> to contribute to the implementation of EU integration policies from a local and regional perspective. The EESC stressed that integration policies were not the exclusive competence of the Member States, but also of local and regional authorities.

2.4 Good governance is needed in order to ensure that public authorities back this social process through appropriate policies. In keeping with the powers they have in the various Member States, local and regional authorities possess political, legislative and budgetary instruments that they must put to good use in integration policies. In order to guarantee the efficacy and overall consistency of programmes and actions, they must be properly supported, coordinated and evaluated at the three levels (national, regional and local).

2.5 The EESC wishes to stress that, at local and regional level, organised civil society is involved in and committed to integration policies and combating discrimination: immigrants' organisations, immigrant support organisations, trade unions, business associations, human rights and anti-racism NGOs; religious communities, organisations of women, young people and residents; educational, cultural and sporting organisations, etc.

2.6 The EESC has stated previously that work represents a fundamental part of the process of social integration, *since decent work is vital to immigrants' self-sufficiency, and it facilitates social relations and mutual understanding between the host society and immigrants* <sup>(11)</sup>.

2.7 Education and training are crucial to integration and equal opportunities. Systems of lifelong training in companies must be bolstered in order to facilitate the recognition of immigrant workers' professional qualifications. The EU must establish more flexible systems for the recognition of academic and professional qualifications obtained in countries of origin.

2.8 The EESC has discussed <sup>(11)</sup> the greater social integration difficulties faced by immigrants when their situation is irregular, and has suggested introducing case-by-case regularisation for irregular workers to take account of the degree to which they have settled in social and employment terms, on the basis of the undertaking by the European Council under the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum <sup>(12)</sup>. Case-by-case regularisations would be carried out under national law for humanitarian or economic reasons, taking account of the greater vulnerability of women.

2.9 Article 19 of the Council of Europe's revised European Social Charter <sup>(13)</sup> lists a series of principles for the integration of immigrant workers and their families which the EESC believes should provide the basis for people's development in cities. It has been ratified by 30 of the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe. The Charter provides for an important system of collective complaints which can be used by trade unions, employers and civil organisations (only 14 countries have ratified this system).

2.10 Furthermore, individuals and representative associations will have an increased opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action in accordance with Article 11 TEU. In an own-initiative opinion of 2010, the EESC welcomed this provision as a milestone on the road to a people's Europe <sup>(14)</sup>, through horizontal dialogue, vertical dialogue and the European citizens' initiative. The EESC believed that representativeness criteria (both quantitative and qualitative) should be introduced for the participation of associations, and proposed that third-country nationals permanently resident in the Union should be able to participate in the initiative.

<sup>(11)</sup> OJ C 354, 28.12.2010, p. 16.

<sup>(12)</sup> Council of the European Union, 13440/08, 24 September 2008.

<sup>(13)</sup> European Social Charter. Turin, 18 October 1961. Council of Europe (Strasbourg). Revised: Strasbourg, 3.V. 1996  
<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/>.

<sup>(14)</sup> OJ C 354, 28.12.2010, p. 59.

<sup>(10)</sup> OJ C 318, 23.12.2006, p. 128.

### 3. European Integration Forum

3.1 At the request of the European Commission, in 2008 the EESC adopted an exploratory opinion<sup>(15)</sup>, which provided the basis for the creation of the Forum, with plenary meetings every six months at the EESC's premises. **The Forum has now held five plenary meetings.** The present opinion was the EESC's contribution to the fifth plenary meeting, held in May 2011, which discussed the importance for integration of the local and regional level.

3.2 The EU institutions, various experts and one hundred representatives of civil society organisations (immigrants' organisations, human rights organisations, social partners and other relevant NGOs) take part in the Forum. The Forum is consulted by the EU institutions, exchanges information and draws up recommendations to promote integration on the European agenda, taking account of national good practice. The Forum is assisted by a Bureau made up of four members (the Commission, EESC and two representatives of relevant organisations). Unlike the Commission's other consultation systems, the Forum expresses civil society's views in a structured, ongoing and proactive fashion.

3.3 The Committee committed itself to playing an active role in the Forum and decided to set up the **Permanent study group on immigration and integration (IMI)** within the SOC section. The permanent study group draws up opinions, holds hearings and contributes to the Forum's activities.

3.4 The Stockholm Programme<sup>(16)</sup> also calls on the Commission to support Member States' efforts for improved consultation with and involvement of civil society, taking into account integration needs in various policy areas. The European Integration Forum and the European integration website must play a key role in this.

3.5 In several Member States and in some regional authorities, consultative forums and platforms have been created in which civil society organisations participate. These methods for the consultation and participation of civil society and immigrants' organisations operate most extensively at local level. They take very varied forms, according to Europe's differing circumstances and social and political cultures.

3.6 Prior to the fourth meeting of the European Integration Forum, the EESC asked the Migration Policy Group to draw up a report assessing the situation of national consultative bodies

on integration<sup>(17)</sup>. There are national consultative bodies in 11 countries (in Germany and Italy there is a legal framework, but not yet an institution; in Ireland it has been set up recently). Fifteen countries have local consultative systems. In 10 countries there are regional consultative councils (such as Germany and other federal countries). In three countries (Austria, France and Greece) there are local consultative bodies, but not national ones.

### 4. The Zaragoza Ministerial Conference

4.1 The EESC contributed to the preparation of the last Ministerial Conference on integration in Zaragoza<sup>(18)</sup> by means of two opinions<sup>(19)</sup>. For the first time, two representatives of the Forum took part in the Ministerial Conference.

4.2 The Conference's conclusions stressed the need to create a **new agenda for integration.** The European Commission is completing its work on drawing up the new agenda for integration, in preparation for which the EESC drew up an information report<sup>(20)</sup>.

4.3 The Zaragoza Declaration states that **civil society plays an active role in the integration process** and that a pilot project must be launched with a view to the evaluation of integration policies.

4.4 Member States, regions and local authorities must strengthen local integration initiatives and methodologies for citizens' participation. The creation of networks and the establishment of channels for dialogue between local and regional authorities and organised civil society will be promoted.

4.5 The indicators mentioned in the Declaration relate to employment, education and social inclusion, and also **include active citizenship**, because immigrants' participation in the democratic process – as active citizens – contributes to their integration and increases their sense of belonging.

4.6 The EESC, which participated in the Conference, pointed out that, as well as quantitative indicators, qualitative indicators should also be drawn up. **Furthermore, the EESC could contribute to the implementation of the conclusions of the Zaragoza Conference, by means of an opinion on active citizenship indicators.**

<sup>(15)</sup> OJ C 27, 3.2.2009, p. 114.

<sup>(16)</sup> The Stockholm Programme — An open and secure Europe serving and protecting the citizen (OJ C 115, 4.5.2010, p. 1). Point 6.1.5.

<sup>(17)</sup> Consulting immigrants to improve national policies, Migration Policy Group.

<sup>(18)</sup> 15 and 16 April 2010.

<sup>(19)</sup> OJ C 347, 18.12.2010, p. 19 and OJ C 354, 28.12.2010, p. 16.

<sup>(20)</sup> OJ C 48, 15.2.2011, p. 6.

## 5. Governance in cities

5.1 The preamble to the 1985 **European Charter of Local Self-Government** <sup>(21)</sup> states that 'the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the democratic principles that are shared by all Member States of the Council of Europe'. This right can be exercised most directly at local level.

5.2 **Convention 144 of the Council of Europe on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level (1992)** <sup>(22)</sup> states that the active participation of foreign residents enhances the development and prosperity of the local community. The convention undertakes to guarantee foreign residents freedom of expression, assembly and association, to promote consultative bodies to represent foreign residents at local level, and finally to promote the right to vote in local authority elections. However, very few Member States of the Council of Europe have signed this convention and the Committee therefore calls upon the Member States to ratify it.

5.3 The **European Charter for the safeguarding of human rights in the city** <sup>(23)</sup>, adopted in St. Denis in 2000 by more than 70 European cities, states that the **city is the political and social space for an accessible democracy**. Active participation by citizens defines the city. The signatory cities undertake to recognise the right to participate in local life through the free and democratic election of local representatives, without distinction between foreign and national citizens, and propose that the right of municipal suffrage be extended to people who have resided in the city for more than two years. Taking account of the restrictions imposed by national legislations, they **call for democracy to be promoted by involving citizens and their associations in decisions concerning the local community** (through public debates, municipal referenda, public meetings, public action, etc.).

5.4 In **2003**, the members of the **Eurocities** network, made up of 128 large European cities, adopted a 'Contribution to good governance concerning the integration of immigrants and the reception of asylum seekers' <sup>(24)</sup>. Drawn up by and for cities, this Charter contains general principles for dealing with integration. It acknowledges that local integration policies are more effective if they have the support of the whole community.

<sup>(21)</sup> European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in June 1985 and open for signature by the Member States on 15 October 1985, the first day of the 20th session of the CLRAE.

<sup>(22)</sup> Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level. Strasbourg, 5.11.1992.

<sup>(23)</sup> European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, 18.5.2000.

<sup>(24)</sup> Contribution to good governance concerning the integration of immigrants and the reception of asylum seekers, 28.11.2003.

5.5 The **Committee of the Regions** (CoR) is particularly pro-active in relation to integration, having drawn up various opinions <sup>(25)</sup> which stress that local and regional bodies are at the forefront in drawing up, implementing, evaluating and monitoring integration policy, and it should therefore be seen as a key player in its development <sup>(26)</sup>. The CoR also notes the importance of local and regional authorities playing an active role in the integration of immigrants, and is cooperating with the European Commission.

5.6 The EESC **adopted** an own-initiative opinion <sup>(27)</sup> addressed to the Convention that drafted the ill-fated Constitutional Treaty, calling for **European citizenship to be granted to third-country nationals having long-term resident status**. The Committee calls on the Commission and the European Parliament to adopt new initiatives to ensure that permanent immigrants are given citizenship rights, particularly at local level.

5.7 The 2nd Commission handbook on integration for policy-makers and practitioners <sup>(28)</sup> recommends investing in social organisation and mobilisation, in structured communication and dialogue and in strengthening local integration networks.

5.8 SMART CITIES <sup>(29)</sup> is an instrument for ongoing evaluation created in 2007 with the participation of 70 medium-sized European cities sharing sustainable development strategies in the fields of the economy, people, governance, mobility, the environment and quality of life. Various indicators are used. The EESC recommends that the proposals contained in this opinion be taken into account in relation to the indicators for people and governance.

5.9 Intercultural Cities (ICC) is a joint action by the Council of Europe and the European Commission created during the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008. Its aim is to contribute to the development of an intercultural integration model in urban communities characterised by their diversity. It sees interculturalism as a means to promote policies and practices to reinforce interaction, understanding and respect between different cultures and ethnic groups.

<sup>(25)</sup> Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on A Common Immigration Policy for Europe (2009/C 76/07).

<sup>(26)</sup> Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening the global approach to migration: increasing coordination, coherence and synergies (2009/C 211/05).

<sup>(27)</sup> OJ C 208, 3.9.2003, p. 76.

<sup>(28)</sup> Handbook on integration for policy-makers and practitioners. Second edition, May 2007.

<sup>(29)</sup> <http://www.smart-cities.eu/>.

5.10 In the document entitled *Citizenship and participation in the intercultural city* <sup>(30)</sup> the ICC programme analyses the methods and procedures which cities can adopt in order to increase intercultural dialogue and interaction. The document reaffirms the principles of the **1992 Convention of the Council of Europe on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level**, and provides a creative approach, recommending more flexible forms of consulting in more informal contexts. It offers a complementary and valuable approach to long-term governance strategies based on consultative bodies.

5.11 A good number of Member States currently guarantee (totally or partially) the right to vote for foreign citizens: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. However, there is little active participation by the foreign population and the EESC therefore believes that public actions in cooperation with civil society should be promoted in order to boost participation by foreigners.

5.12 According to MIPEX III, in Europe, third-country nationals can stand as municipal candidates in 13 countries, vote in municipal elections in 19, vote in regional elections in seven and vote in national elections in two (Portugal and the United Kingdom). As we have already pointed out, there are national consultative bodies in 11 countries and local consultative bodies in 15.

5.13 The information in MIPEX III contains some very important indications, not just regarding countries which consult immigrants, but also regarding the development of genuine integration policies. **The countries with strong consultative structures are the countries that guarantee political freedoms for everybody**, back immigrant civil society with sufficient funding, extend voting rights and full citizenship and do most to promote full participation by all residents in consultative systems regarding employment, education, health and housing. MIPEX points out that consultative bodies are not a substitute for voting rights.

5.14 The strongest consultative councils in Europe are those which have been operating the longest (some since the 70s and 80s), and are found in the countries with the greatest traditions of immigration. On the other hand, the weakest are in the countries where immigration is most recent, in the south of Europe. The countries of Central Europe, which are recent recipients of immigration, have under-developed systems.

5.15 An analysis of these platforms in light of the Council of Europe's criteria <sup>(31)</sup> suggests that the creation and permanence of these structures should not depend upon the will of authorities and governments, but rather that they require

specific legal provisions. They must be able to adopt initiatives and receive responses and information in the areas on which they have been consulted, and from the comments made at the 5th European Integration Forum it would appear that this is not usually the case. They must be representative structures with clear immigrant leadership and have sufficient financial resources <sup>(32)</sup>. The EESC stresses the importance of ensuring that organisations are representative and that women participate.

5.16 During the drawing-up of the opinion, a hearing was held in Valencia on 30 March 2011 between the EESC and the Regional Government of Valencia, on **Cooperation between local and regional administrations and civil society organisations**. In the various speeches, experiences in the areas of consultation and participation were presented by Rome (Italy), the Flanders Region (Belgium), Strasbourg (France), Dublin (Ireland), the Hesse Region (Germany), Aarhus (Denmark) and Valencia (Spain). This opinion reflects many of the experiences and views discussed at the meeting.

5.17 **The EESC believes that local and regional authorities should allow persons of immigrant origin to exercise the right of association**, since national legislations grant third-country nationals a limited citizenship status (insufficient and unequal recognition of the right to vote). Associations promote organised participation, strengthen solidarity networks, improve conditions for the settling and well-being of citizens and ultimately benefit the entire community.

5.18 **Local and regional authorities must promote the formation of associations, particularly for immigrants, and support them with technical resources** (advice on association management, democratic, economic, financial and communications management; capacity-building measures, leadership, particularly for immigrant women; promoters of forums and networks, exchange of good practices etc); **financial resources** (subsidies, agreements or the award of service-provision contracts); **material resources** (infrastructures for bodies: premises and basic resources for carrying out activities), particularly in the case of e-inclusion actions.

5.19 Local and regional authorities must promote **the inclusion of immigrants in civil society organisations**, as members and as directors. Of particular importance are residents' associations, parents' associations in educational establishments, women's associations, cultural, sporting and leisure associations, religious communities, and trade union and business organisations. Trade union organisations in Europe have a great tradition of membership and participation by workers of immigrant origin. There is great ethnic and cultural diversity amongst their members and they perform a crucial social mediation function.

<sup>(30)</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/paperviarregio\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/paperviarregio_en.pdf).

<sup>(31)</sup> Convention 144 of the Council of Europe on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level (1992).

<sup>(32)</sup> Consulting immigrants to improve national policies. Thomas Huddleston, Migration Policy Group.

5.20 Relations between immigrants' associations and the rest of organised civil society must also be boosted, promoting the creation of networks based on common social goals for all citizens (education, employment, housing, town-planning and urban development). The European Year of Volunteering offers an opportunity to recognise and support organisations.

5.21 These take many different forms in the EU: forums, consultative platforms and councils, dialogue groups. The 3rd Handbook on integration for policy-makers states that a dialogue platform is a civic space 'in which to begin an open and respectful exchange of views among immigrants, with fellow residents, or with government'. The objective is for participants to develop shared understanding and trust.

5.22 The EESC believes that **the European Integration Forum must work in a network with the existing consultative councils and forums in the EU**. In the Member States as well, local and regional forums should set up networks. (There is a very interesting case in Denmark, where the 14 members of the national ethnic minorities council are elected by the 42 local forums.)

5.23 The EESC **wants** to promote more democratic cities in Europe, boosting **common citizenship** linked to residence in the city (urban citizenship, to use the words of the Deputy Mayor of Rotterdam), bearing in mind that the city is the most important place for developing a shared sense of belonging amongst highly diverse people. The majority of immigrants identify more with the city in which they live

than with the State. It is in cities, first and foremost, that people share their problems, plans and dreams.

## 6. The European Integration Fund

6.1 The 5th European Integration Forum discussed the functioning of the Fund in the context of the mid-term evaluation being carried out by the European Commission. In accordance with its conclusions, the EESC proposes that:

6.1.1 Priority should be given to the **principle of cooperation** laid down in Article 10 of the Decision on the Fund. The Member States should therefore involve local and regional authorities and organisations representing civil society in the drawing-up, implementation and (ex post) evaluation of the multiannual programme and the use of the Fund at national level.

6.1.2 The Fund's current rules and procedures are too complex and create administrative barriers, hindering the funding both of civil society and of local and regional authorities<sup>(33)</sup>. **The EESC recommends that those rules be revised in cooperation with the European Integration Forum** and in accordance with the principle of cooperation, particularly those relating to the criteria of access, match funding, transparency and people. In order to ensure that the Fund provides added value, the EESC believes that all projects funded must guarantee that the first common basic principle – 'integration is a two-way process' – is implemented.

Brussels, 13 July 2011.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Staffan NILSSON

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<sup>(33)</sup> See S. Carrera and A. Faure Atger (2011), Integration as a two-way process in the EU: Assessing the Relationship between the European Integration Fund and the Common Basic Principles on Integration, Executive Summary, Centre for European Policy Studies, CEPS: Brussels. Available at [http://www.ceps.eu/system/files/research\\_area/2011/02/CEPS EIF study\\_summary.pdf](http://www.ceps.eu/system/files/research_area/2011/02/CEPS EIF study_summary.pdf).