

3rd Intergovernmental Conference on the linguistic integration of adult migrants

Opening address

by

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On behalf of Ms Samardžić-Marković, Director General of the Council of Europe Directorate General of Democracy, I am very pleased to welcome you to this conference on “Quality in the linguistic integration of adult migrants: from values to policy and practice”.

This conference comes at a particularly opportune moment. The integration of adult migrants into European societies is more relevant than ever. We have seen too many misunderstandings, too much human suffering, too many tragic events, unacceptable in a democratic society.

The Council of Europe attaches a lot importance to education and languages. These subjects directly concern the state of human rights and the future of a multilingual, multicultural Europe. They are politically sensitive issues, which need to be addressed with respect for the different backgrounds of adult migrants who have just arrived or recently settled in the host country. The aim is to assist them in their desire to open a new chapter of their life, and help them adapt to their new life situation.

[Complementarity in the assistance provided to migrants]

The Directorate General of Democracy is not the only Council of Europe sector involved in these activities and I am very pleased to welcome **Ambassador Castro Mendes**, Permanent Representative of Portugal and Chair of the Rapporteurs Group on Education, Culture, Sport, Youth and the Environment of the Committee of Ministers. I also welcome **Mr Le Borgn'**, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, who will also shortly be taking the floor.

I am pleased to point out that, like the Council of Europe, other international organisations are continuing to put emphasis on *quality* in the linguistic integration of adult migrants. Tomorrow, representatives of the OECD and the European Commission will address the conference.

[Language policy instruments]

The Council of Europe has already made available to member States tools such as the “Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters”, whose potential application to adult migrants in their language training still needs to be assessed.

Other, more recent, tools will be presented to you during the Conference: for example the “Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants” website or the “Guide to policy development and

implementation concerning the linguistic integration of adult migrants”, which aims to place the offer of language courses in the political context of the management of economic migration.

Among other things, these tools highlight the fact that the term “migrant” refers to a demographic, sociological and administrative category — but certainly not to a language group.

Migrants do not fall within one single category of learners. Their learning needs and capabilities are complex and varied. The measures taken by public authorities and the teaching methods used in such training courses must therefore take account of this wide range of needs and expectations.

[Quality in education]

This third intergovernmental conference, which has been organised by the Language Policy Unit of the Education Department, will look at only one of the many aspects of these complex issues: the quality of language courses and linguistic evaluation for migrants in member States.

This is not a secondary issue. Only high-quality training will ensure the proper linguistic integration of the persons concerned and guarantee the effective use of public resources.

In 2012 the Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation¹ to member States which focused on the importance of quality in education.

Such quality can also be achieved in language courses for adult migrants. One precondition is that the adult migrants are not treated as immature pupils but as future fellow citizens. This is what most of them want to be, and may indeed become.

Learning one of the languages of the host country greatly facilitates integration; it is important, however, not to forget that it is by *living* in the new society that the person will acquire the necessary communication skills. Language skills are not the only precondition for successful integration; rather, they are often the result of successful integration.

[Quality education and democracy]

The efforts to achieve quality in education for adult migrants admittedly include very important technical aspects, on which you will have very valuable discussions during this conference.

However, no matter how relevant these technical aspects are, they must be assessed in the light of their contribution to the respect for diversity and to active citizenship. The democratic management of cultural and linguistic diversity is an essential aspect of education. Language training courses play a crucial role, well beyond providing the linguistic skills required for employment and social and cultural life. They contribute to social cohesion and reduce the social tensions generated by ethnocentric attitudes and behaviour.

¹ CM/Rec (2012)13

As such, these programmes are also part of a wider policy of diversity management. The Council of Europe has developed quite a few initiatives to support public authorities in the member States in their quest to better respond to the requirements of a multicultural society. The “Intercultural Cities” network is one outstanding example; it brings together over 50 European cities and several national networks, committed to modernize their political and administrative practice in order to benefit from the “diversity advantage” and improve the integration of migrants in their midst. We are convinced, incidentally, that both the LIAM project and the “Intercultural Cities” network stand to gain from closer co-operation.

[Conclusions]

Back to languages in education, where the Council of Europe has a long history of pioneering work.

As is the case for all its activities, all the work it has done and to which this conference will further contribute is only fully justified if it helps to meet the broader objectives of the Council of Europe — if it strengthens democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Now, more than ever, it is necessary to promote and uphold these common values. Developing education oriented towards mutual understanding is one of the best ways of addressing the challenges of tomorrow.

I wish this conference every success. The programme offers wonderful opportunities to hear about examples of good practice and to benefit from the experience made in other parts of our continent. I am confident that new solutions for the genuine linguistic integration of adult migrants will emerge from our debate.

Thank you very much for your attention.