

Strasbourg 01 February 2018

Draft introductory speech for the President of the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies

Rabat, 8 February 2018

Dear Sirs, President of the House of Councillors and President of the House of Representatives and

Dear Minister, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to hold our first Regional Meeting of the newly created Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies in Rabat and I wish to extend my warmest thanks to the Moroccan authorities, especially **Mr Benchamach**, President of the House of Councillors of the Parliament of Morocco **Mr El Malki**, President of the House of Representatives, and for their invitation and support to the organisation of this seminar.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our world is becoming increasingly interconnected. People, capitals, ideas, goods and services circulate more and more freely than ever. A quarter of a billion women and men live outside their countries of birth. Of course, the rapid increase in migration has led to debates about issues such as integration and assimilation, multiculturalism and discrimination, freedom of religion and respect for those who have different religions or no religion at all... these are the challenges of our life, which we should face together.

Diasporas can be highly beneficial for both host countries and countries of origin. Host countries can benefit from the diversity, ideas and contribution of migrants. *[If we look back in recent history, all major cities which became famous and real (albeit temporarily) "centres of the world" (and two of them, Venezia and Genova are situated in my own country) shared a number of characteristics. One of these was their capacity to attract, accept and integrate – without necessarily assimilate- foreign diasporas¹; the other was the capacity to put to good use important innovations, usually not invented in the city itself, but imported by diasporas.]*

Of course, for the positive contribution of diasporas in the host country to materialise, authorities of these countries, both central and local, need to actively strive to empower and engage diasporas, to examine and respond to their needs, to include diasporas in decision-making policies, and to co-operate with them in formulating diaspora-oriented programmes in order to ensure their economic, social and cultural development.

¹ According to Jacques Attali, « Une brève histoire de l'avenir », under the « market order » which substituted the « military order » around 1200, which in its turn had substituted the "ritual (religious) order", nine "hearts" or "centres" of the world substituted each other: Bruges, Venice, Antwerp, Genoa, Amsterdam, Londres, Boston, New York, Los Angeles

When this does not happen, when, on the contrary, public authorities of the host countries make no effort to help with the integration of the diaspora, when migrants are put into special “neighbourhoods”, when there is a general feeling of mistrust in migrants, when they are excluded from the labour market and from decision-making mechanisms, when they are discriminated against, migrants may find themselves crammed into ghettos, where they can neither fulfil their potential nor, in general, have access to the same rights and opportunities as the other members of society.

Dear participants,

Diaspora can also be very beneficial to their countries of origin. We speak a lot about the “brain drain” that countries lose as a result of emigration, but more rarely do we speak about the advantages that they return to them. And I am not speaking only about financial remittances, but also all the new ideas, technologies and cultural novelties which they can contribute in order to enrich the countries where they were born. In fact, most migrants leave, but never abandon their countries. *[My own country is now mainly a host or transit country for migrants, but was for a long time primarily a country of origin and benefitted from the contribution, new experience, new ideas, and new resources that Italian migrants brought back to the country where they were born, raised and educated.]*

Of course, for these advantages to materialise there is a need for the creation of strong diaspora associations and for them to have regular and open contacts with the authorities of the countries of origin. When a country of origin treats its diasporas well, they will return the thanks with interest.

Dear colleagues,

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had the great idea of setting up this Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies in order to allow all stakeholders to come together, exchange ideas and learn from best practice on how to support diaspora’s integration without assimilation and their departure from their countries without abandoning them. Having an institutionalised mechanism for political dialogue concerning diaspora should allow the setting out of effective solutions for creating inclusive, tolerant and welcoming societies. *[In other words, this would allow diaspora members to have access to their full rights, including, as the US Declaration of Independence puts it, “preservation of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”.]*

Today, at the Sub-committee on Diasporas we approved the idea of launching a new initiative of this Network; a yearly Award for the best performing diaspora association; the association which best succeeded in mobilising and engaging diaspora members and facilitating their relations with and contribution to both the host countries and the countries of origin. As soon as this idea has been endorsed by the Parliamentary Assembly, we will be able to launch the process.

My heartfelt thanks go not only to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for this initiative, but also to the Swiss Confederation, which through a generous and very timely voluntary contribution made the creation of the Network and its work possible. I do believe that

our results will justify the trust the Parliamentary Assembly and our donor have put in us and that this Network will become a symbol of hope for diasporas and authorities alike, a platform of exchange of good ideas, best practices and recommendations for improvement.

Dear friends,

We will be discussing today the role of diaspora associations and parliaments in the prevention of migrants' radicalisation. But we should not link migration and diaspora with radicalisation! In the absence of good policies for integration, in the presence of hate speech, disparaging language and attitudes, xenophobia and sometimes outright racist remarks, entire populations may become radicalised and create a vicious circle of exclusion and extremism.

Our role is and must always be to break such a vicious circle and create in its stead a virtuous one of integration, participation, mutual respect and contribution.

I wish us all great success in this endeavour.

Thank you very much for your attention.