

## **Fachtagung “Migration-Integration” am 23/24 Mai in Bonn**

### ***DRAFT SPEECH – ONLY SPOKEN WORD STANDS***

#### **Opening Speech by Jens Nymand Christensen**

Sehr geehrte Frau Bogedan,  
Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

Ich freue mich, heute hier bei Ihnen zu sein! Und ich freue mich ganz besonders, hier unter vielen Menschen zu sein, die das Erasmus Programm für ihre Arbeit nutzen und so das europäische Projekt mit Leben erfüllen!

Jean-Claude Juncker hat in seiner Laudatio zur Verleihung des Karlspreises an Papst Franziskus vor zwei Wochen gesagt, "Europa – das ist für mich die Vereinigung der besten Kräfte, die in den Europäern stecken. Europa – das ist der Student, der dank des Erasmus-Programmes in einem anderen Land studieren kann". Und er hätte auch von den vielen Schulen, Berufsschulen, und Jugendorganisationen sprechen können, die im Rahmen dieses Programms Partnerschaften entwickeln und zusammen arbeiten.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me continue in English, please, – I think that it will eventually be both easier for me and clearer for you.

#### **1. Europe and recent challenges**

We, as European citizens, have been confronted with significant challenges over the past number of years: the 2008 world economic crisis and its aftermath, the extreme financial vulnerability of some Member States, the Ukrainian crisis, and recently the growing threat of violent radicalisation/terrorism and the flow of migrants and refugees that have arrived in Europe from our neighbouring regions, fleeing war, poverty and persecution.

Some claim the European Union has shown political weakness in handling these crises. Some go even further, and say that the EU might actually be part of the problem. I fundamentally disagree with such a charge. It is true that our union needs to be reinforced and improved; there is no doubt about it. We have to learn to be more coordinated and more efficient, to prevent crises instead of reacting to them. Europe does not always act with unity and coordination. However, it cannot be denied that a united Europe is needed more than ever before. Guided by our shared values – values that have brought peace and prosperity to our countries over the past 60 years – the European Union must face up to these challenges with a clear vision of what must be done. This conviction must guide our policies and actions at all times.

Consider for a moment what the outcome of the migration crisis might have been had each member state been forced to deal with it on their own? How could our countries address

major threats such as climate change and the fading of natural resources or the consequences of globalisation if not by doing it united?

## **2. Migration**

This is not the first time that our countries are faced with a flow of refugees and migrants. 10% of the population in Europe is of migrant background. We must therefore use the knowledge gained from our previous experiences to improve our policies. If well managed, migration is not a threat but a resource for our economies and societies. (I will come back to this point in a few minutes).

## **3. Radicalisation**

The recent terrorist attacks in France, Denmark and Belgium tell us we need more effective ways to reach young people. We must work to ensure that they understand and embrace our hard-fought common values and ultimately experience the benefits of social inclusion. Education, youth work, social services, culture and sport – they all have a crucial role to play in preventing violent radicalisation. They can also help young generations to integrate new realities into European societies. I speak of multiculturalism, multilingualism and religious diversity.

These new realities need not and will not dilute our fundamental values. Radicalisation is not necessarily linked to those who come from a migrant background. Sadly, when we talk about radicalisation, we talk also of European citizens who have set fire to refugee homes and have been pushing an extreme nationalist agenda.

Migration and radicalisation are two separate issues. We should avoid mixing them. Social inclusion may offer an answer to both challenges.

## **4. Education, migration and social inclusion**

Education is part of the answer. Education is a powerful means to provide everyone – and in particular migrants and refugees – with the skills needed to flourish in the classroom, to find employment and, ultimately, to achieve personal fulfilment. This is eventually the basis for better integration, social cohesion and strengthened human capital in our societies. Our teachers, youth workers and other key actors are doing invaluable work on the front line of the action and we should support them.

## **5. Skills and role of teachers**

The vast majority of asylum seekers are low skilled people of working age and children who have been forcibly removed from education, often for a long time. Our most urgent mandate is to integrate them into our mainstream education structures as early as possible. This starts with early childhood education and extends to school, vocational training, higher education

and adult learning. The objective is to provide them with the skills needed to flourish in our societies and, ultimately, prevent them from becoming marginalised and falling into poverty.

- First priority: provide special support to address the low level of basic skills in children. Invest in teacher training and language teaching.
- Second priority: prevent underachievement of migrants in the medium or long term. In other words: to allow migrants to fulfil their potential.
- Third priority, exploit the potential of non-formal and informal learning. Youth work plays a crucial role in promoting behaviours based on democratic values and creating links between formal and non-formal education. Social inclusion and intercultural dialogue can also be fostered through powerful drivers of integration such as sport, culture or volunteering.

A cross sectorial, inter-institutional approach is essential. We all must play a part: the EU and national institutions; public institutions, social partners and civil society. We must learn from our past experiences. In most EU countries, past migration flows have resulted in highly segregated educational systems. Young immigrants have concentrated in urban centres or in disadvantaged areas, where the percentage of pupils not speaking the language of instruction is well above 50%.

## **6. What can the EU do?**

The EU does not have competences in education or in integration policies. However, it counts on proven effective tools to promote social inclusion. We provide concrete support to organisations on the ground and we are framing the policy dialogue among national administrations.

We have been fast in reacting to the needs in the Member States and quickly mobilised the existing EU programmes and tools. We have adapted and reoriented existing programmes such as Erasmus+ (400 million € and 13 million € on social inclusion) and Creative Europe to provide support to teachers and organisations working on the frontline of the crisis.

The European Social Fund supported actions reaching more than 5 million migrants between 2007 and 2013. In the same 2007-2013 period, as much as 825 million EUR was spent under the European Integration Fund. In terms of policy, we have introduced resources such as the Peer Learning Activities to provide assistance to the member states. In April 2016, Sweden hosted the first peer learning activity on welcome classes and skills assessment. In June, a peer learning activity on unaccompanied minors and language learning will take place here in Germany, hosted by the Government of Saxony.

Good practices are also collected and publicised on the school Education Gateway, an electronic Platform available to teachers and schools. We are working with national recognition centres on speeding up the recognition of qualifications in the area of higher education. And we are working with experts and colleagues in the OECD and other organisations to collect more evidence on which to base our policies.

I am happy to report that all measures that the EU plans to take to support integration of migrants in key areas such as education, employment, housing or health will be presented in an action plan that the Commission is set to publish in June (7 June). We look forward to fruitful, meaningful engagement with our partners on the implementation of this action plan.

### *Conclusions*

Ladies and gentlemen, the migrant and refugee crisis continues to cause human suffering on a shocking scale. I am deeply convinced that the EU – as an institution built on shared values and the principle of unity – will be at the forefront of finding solutions to this crisis. Acting together with our partners in political and civil society, I am sure that we can succeed.

Thank you very much.