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International Migration: Promoting Management and Integration

Parallel to the dramatic global changes that we have witnessed in political and economic spheres, international migration movements have been rapidly expanding worldwide, thus making up a new challenge for the world community to be addressed and managed. The management of international migration, as well as promoting integration, being very essential aspects in that regard, are of significant importance for the global peace, stability, and welfare. These factors are also vital for attaining a strong human rights culture in our world.

This issue bears an additional significance for Turkey, mainly due to the high number of Turkish migrant workers residing in different parts of the world, first and foremost in the EU Member States.

The movement of Turkish citizens to fill in the gaps in the labour markets of the rapidly developing Western European countries has started in the early 1960s. Originally, the common goal of the Turkish “guest workers” was to save enough money to open up a small shop or to invest on the plot of land already in their possessions thus enabling these workers one day to come back home to start a business of their own. With this in mind, it was no surprise that most of these “guest workers” went alone to their destinations leaving their families back home. The emigration of Turkish workers to Western Europe continued until 1974. Since then, Turkish work force started to move towards North Africa, Middle East, Gulf countries, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, towards Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. This change may be explained by the further opening of the Turkish economy to the world and the undertaking of huge infrastructural projects by Turkish contractors in those regions.

Turkey desires that Turks living abroad be fully integrated in their social environments. In this framework, Turkey encourages its citizens to integrate into the societies they are living in via enhancing their social, economical, cultural and political status, thus creating another cultural bridge between sending and hosting countries. Many Turks today participate in the social and economic life of the host countries, not only as plain workers, but also as academicians, researchers, experts, scientists, doctors, journalists, businessmen, artists, and other professionally active persons. In the economic field, the status of many Turks has already or is gradually evolving from a status of a simple worker to a self-employed status. Furthermore, they are gradually becoming employers. Just to give an example, the number of Turkish businesses set up in Germany alone has exceeded 59.000. These businesses have created job opportunities for around 330.000 persons in Germany.

Education, employment, political rights and improvement of social and judicial status, as well as racism and xenophobia are the main issues of concern for Turks living abroad. Turkish migrants should be regarded and treated not as aliens, but as individuals sharing the same responsibilities and therefore should enjoy the same rights as other members of the society. These are essential elements for their integration and cohesion.

Social integration aims at eliminating discriminatory policies or practices which prevent migrants from becoming socially active members of the society. However beyond that, equal treatment in all aspects of life, giving the feeling that they are equal should also help integration. For instance the laws of receiving countries in some cases do not allow some members of a family to live together with the family. Thus the integrity of the family is distorted. It is a human right to be able to maintain the integrity of the family, and this right should be secured for these people as well, so that the families are not divided.

As regards cultural integration the key word is education. Children should be given the opportunity to benefit fully from the education opportunities in the country. The education of those children in their native language, culture, and history is also of particular importance for the purpose of integration.

Expansion of the irregular international migration movements, was unfortunately followed by one of the very global threats to human dignity, i.e human trafficking. This phenomenon evolved into a commonly observed form of human rights abuses, which has wide ranging impact both in terms of its scope and victims. The experience that is shared by many refers to the very fact that human trafficking activities have been a concern to a wide range of countries. The evidence also points that women and children are becoming primary targets of human traffickers. The activities regarding this issue are driven by underground networks, often bearing an international nature, and that they generally go hand in hand with domestic and international organized crime rings.

In the face of gravity of the problem, Turkey, a country situated at the crossroads of Asia, Middle East and Europe, bordering eight countries, and lapped by 5,000 miles of coastline, has been seriously confronted with various forms of transnational organized crime, posing a threat to its social order, as well as human and democratic values.

In recent years, Turkey has become a country of destination for human trafficking, and it is also a transit country. Unlike other European countries, flexible visa and travel regulations in Turkey enable foreigners to enter the country easily on individual basis, without particular assistance from organized groups or agencies. Countries that are surrounding Turkey from the North to the North-East are generally accepted as countries of origin. Nationals of these countries may enter Turkey by a visa obtained at the ports of entry and they can stay in Turkey up to one month. Their purpose is two-fold. The first and the foremost is the “luggage trade”. The second purpose is to find employment regardless of the work conditions.

While their presence in Turkey is mainly voluntary, the work they hold illegally and their vulnerable status, nevertheless, make them susceptible to exploitation. Some of them acquire Turkish citizenship through arranged marriages and obtain legal residency in Turkey. Some others end up in small workshops, or in private households, working illegally without any job security, insurance or administrative and judicial safeguards. Those who are employed in tourism and entertainment sector may become vulnerable to further exploitation and trafficking.

Considering the scourge of human trafficking as a serious threat to human dignity, I am particularly happy to express at this forum, the introduction of certain reforms concerning the

fight against human trafficking and illegal migration, within the general framework of the ongoing legal reform process.

In addition to many longstanding international instruments dealing with “white slave trade” and trafficking in “women and children”, Turkey is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

According to Article 34 and 35 of the Convention, Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of exploitation and abuse and to take all appropriate national, bilateral, and multilateral measures to prevent the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; the exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; and the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and material.

On 9 May 2002, the Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Turkey was among the initial signatories of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and of its two additional Protocols including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking, especially women and children. The said Convention and its additional protocols have been approved by the Turkish Parliament on 18 May 2003.

By adopting these international instruments Turkey clearly indicates her political will to combat against trafficking in human beings in all aspects in close co-operation with the world community and commits herself to translate the provisions included therein into its own legislation.

In fulfillment of the provisions of the UN Conventions Against Transnational Organized Crime and its additional protocols, an amendment to Article 201 of the Penal Code and an amendment to the law on Combating Benefits-Orientated Criminal Organizations have been prepared by the Ministry of Justice and were adopted by the Parliament on 3 August 2002. In conformity with the Palermo Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, this law among its other provisions, introduces the definition of the trafficking in human beings into Turkish legal system and prescribes serious penalties that are increased with aggravating circumstances to prohibit trafficking in persons. As I mentioned briefly above, a new Penal Code is under discussion currently. The new law is expected to include some specific articles addressing the issue of trafficking in women and children. Some political parties, including People’s Republic Party which I belong to and women’s movement in Turkey have been working on the integration of gender perspective in this piece of legislation.

Most recent legislative arrangement was made to prevent illegal working in private households through changing the Code on Work Permits for Foreigners to enable foreigners to take on domestic work, on 6 September 2003. Thus illegal working which causes susceptibility to exploitation is addressed in regard to work in private households.

Legislative process has been initiated to make changes in the law to enable victims of trafficking to be treated free of charge at state hospitals.

The National Task Force on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has been formed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is also the National Coordinator in this issue. The National Task Force consists of officials from the relevant state institutions.

As a result of the work of the said National Task Force, a draft National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has been prepared and finalized.

There are various additional measures taken in that regard both in legal, administrative and educational spheres such as training and public awareness activities to ensure provision of social, physical and psychological rehabilitation of the victims of trafficking, and yet time will not allow me to refer to them all.

At the international level, Turkey actively supports counter-trafficking efforts and activities of the OSCE and the Stability Pact Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings and adheres to the norms and standards developed in these fora for the prevention of trafficking, the prosecution of traffickers, and the protection of victims. Turkey also co-operates with UNHCR, IOM, SECI, and EUROPOL in these areas.

We should keep in mind that the very challenge of migration management is of complex international nature. Individual efforts in that regard will hardly bear effective results. Therefore it should be addressed by global cooperation and by efforts of us all with a spirit of burden sharing.