



European Economic and Social Committee
The President

Brussels, 31.05.2012, the EESC, Room JDE62

Seventh meeting of the EUROPEAN INTEGRATION FORUM
"Public Hearing on Right to Family Reunification of Third Country Nationals
living in the EU"

Staffan Nilsson's welcome address

Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
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Dear Cecilia, dear Henrik, dear Salvatore and dear friends!

Welcome to the European Economic and Social Committee for the 7th meeting of the European Integration Forum.

I don't want to talk too long, because many of you have certainly questions to ask, and the EESC is a house for debates.

I will just welcome the fact that, this time, there is something new in the format of this meeting of the **European Integration Forum**. The EESC has immediately welcomed the idea of the Commissioner Malmström of joining the European Integration Forum's meeting with a Public hearing.



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It is important, because it gathers national and regional authorities, NGOs, other stakeholders and individuals, who sent their contribution to the public consultation launched by the European Commission.

Indeed, The EESC fully supports the **EC's green paper on Family reunification**. We are also aware that it is a difficult subject. There is a strong debate among Member States. This is why today's conference is so important: the Forum must have its say on it.

We, at the Committee, believe that family reunification has a strong dimension of integration:

- First and foremost, the Commission Directive should be debated in the light of the many international treaties and conventions protecting private life, the family and family members, particularly children. I personally think that family reunification should be a right, because without his family, one cannot get the chance to have a fulfilling and decent life;
- Secondly, family reunification is the door to integration. A migrant worker will get much faster integrated if he can accompany his children at school and try to help them learning a new language.

Through this event and especially through the involvement of the Forum, civil society organisations dealing with integration will be able to express their views on this issue. I hope you will give a wider and more balanced picture to the EU institutions, as well as to Member States.

Europe's demographic and economic outlook makes opening the door to third-country nationals wishing to live in the EU a necessity. European society must continue being open, regardless of the crisis and of fluctuations in the labour market. European society should be aware that immigration is an opportunity for Europe and not a burden, like some populist voices raise it more and more often. It is true that immigration is a long and sometimes difficult process in which both immigrant and a host society must make efforts. In this regard, integration is a key issue. This is why family reunification can play an important role in the process.



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I said I would be short. I will stop here and listen to you know, and I thank you all very much for coming today and tomorrow.

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