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#### COVER NOTE

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From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Presidency conclusions from the informal exchange on integration and social cohesion "United in diversity – promoting the European way of life together"

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Delegations will find attached Presidency conclusions from the Informal exchange on integration and social cohesion organised by the German Presidency of the Council of the EU on 9 November 2020.

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Encl.: PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS



# United in diversity – promoting the European way of life together

## Informal exchange on integration and social cohesion at the invitation of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU on 9 November 2020

### Conclusions of the German Council Presidency

1. Successful integration is a prerequisite for a successful Europe. The participation of migrants in all areas of society and the ensuing promotion of strong and heterogeneous communities in which consensus can be achieved, is in everyone's interest and helps to keep Europe liveable and competitive. Migrants and host societies alike benefit from successful integration. It is key to social cohesion.
2. It is essential for everyone to recognise and respect common universal, national and European rules and values such as human rights, freedom of expression, democracy, equal rights for men and women, and religious freedom: this is the necessary foundation for successful integration and a precondition for social cohesion. Contempt for the democratic order and values of EU Member States as well as violations of Member States' national laws must be neither downplayed nor tolerated, regardless of their motivation. This fundamental consensus is crucial for the success and cohesion of our diverse societies. The fundamental European values defined by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union as well as the rights and obligations of EU citizens laid down in the constitutions of the Member States, should be taught to everyone in Europe. Teaching those values should therefore also be a priority in the context of orientation and

integration courses for migrants. Successful integration means identifying both with a national community and with the European Union and entails assuming joint responsibility for positive social interactions, equal participation in society, and the success and promotion of the European way of life.

3. The principle of offering support but requiring a level of effort in return (*fordern und fördern*) is a core principle of integration policy. This means that migrants are expected to make an active effort to integrate, while concurrently receiving support with their integration process, e.g. through language and orientation courses as well as other measures aimed at increasing participation in the labour market and society at large.
4. At the same time, firm action must be taken at all levels to fight racism and discrimination on the grounds of colour, origin, gender, language, religion or ideology.
5. Successful integration can help European societies to live up to the opportunities and challenges arising from the increasing migration-related diversity and allow them to use this diversity to their advantage by strengthening social cohesion.  
Social integration and cohesion can succeed and diversity can be a competitive advantage if existing challenges are acknowledged and segregation and marginalisation are tackled at all levels of society. This requires intercultural exchange and interaction between people of different backgrounds and with different experiences of life in Europe, especially in the various communities people are part of (neighbourhood, local area, town, region, etc.). This means increasing tolerance for diversity among all members of society, both migrants and host societies.

6. Lasting conditions to enable participation must be created. Migrants legally residing in the EU should be able to use their potential to the fullest and participate as equals in the social, economic and cultural life of their Member State of residence, with the result of strengthening society as a whole. A migrant background should not be an obstacle to successful integration into society, the education system or the labour market.
7. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants in Europe is particularly significant. It is therefore necessary to intensify the exchange at European level on lessons learnt from this crisis with regard to integration policy and best practices, also taking into account the central role of migrants in healthcare professions and other types of system-critical work as well as the related working conditions. More discussion at European level is also needed with respect to civic engagement and the need to make better use of digital technologies wherever possible, e.g. in integration and language courses and public integration and support services. The importance of this is being highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
8. The experience of Member States shows that the participation rate of women in language courses is lower than that of men and that their integration in the labour market is often slower and more difficult since women are often responsible for childcare and caring for the elderly. In the future women must have equal opportunities in the labour market and in society. Integration measures must provide greater and more targeted support for women. To increase women's participation in integration measures and the labour market it is important to make training and employment more compatible with family life and childcare. At the same time, mothers, and sometimes also fathers or older siblings who take care of unaccompanied minors, play an important role as integration multipliers in their families. If they integrate successfully, their children or younger siblings have better prospects for success in school and vocational education and are more likely to feel valued by, and identify with, the host society. Good education and care in early childhood are therefore especially important in the early stages of the integration process. Only then many mothers, as well as fathers and older siblings, will be able to benefit from integration services.

This is also called for in the EU's Gender Equality Strategy. In this context, the expertise of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) should be fully taken advantage of.

9. We recognise the work of the European Commission, within the framework of its competences, in assisting Member States in the field of integration. In particular, we welcome the Commission's intention to present an Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion to follow up on its 2016 Action Plan on Integration<sup>1</sup> and to establish an expert group on the views of migrants.
10. To achieve these aims, it is essential to continue and intensify the expert exchange at European level, in particular within the framework of the European Integration Network (EIN) and the the European Migration Forum (EMF).
11. Exchanges between Member States and the European Commission in the area of social cohesion in the Member States and in the European Union should be strengthened as a common alliance. Decision-makers from Member States and EU institutions working in the field of migration, integration and social cohesion should work together even more closely to share views and Member States' experiences in these areas, in particular to promote European values, civic engagement and trust in democratic institutions and the European Union. The aim is to unite the societies of the Member States and to make Europe a home for all of its citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2016) 377 final; Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals of 7 June 2016.