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SUMMARY OF THE SPEECH BY MR. H. VREDELING, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN  
COMMISSION, TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN LONDON ON  
27 MARCH 1979

In a speech to the National Council of Social Services in London today the Vice-President of the European Commission, Henk Vredeling, advocated consultation and coordination at Community level on the policy of the Member States vis-à-vis migration from non-member countries.

According to Vice-President Vredeling, coordination is not only necessary in order to bring order into the confusion of schemes in force in the Community and align them - there are, in the legal sense, at least seven types of migrants in the European Community - but above all to increase control of the labour market. Mr. Vredeling said: "As integration within the Community progresses, the need for a coordinated approach to immigration from non-member countries will become increasingly evident. The universally desired revival of economic growth, towards which our policies are directed, must inevitably lead to an improvement in the labour market situation. At the same time, it is highly unlikely that the situation will develop along exactly the same lines in all countries. Some will find themselves suffering from manpower shortages. In a situation where there is unemployment within the Community, importing further workers from outside the Community should be one of the last solutions to be considered".

Mr. Vredeling warned against tension which might all too easily arise between foreign workers and "our own" workers during a period of recession and unemployment. He pointed out that foreign workers have been keeping our production going and maintaining our standard of living for 20 years, and that they were, in fact, still doing so. It was particularly unreasonable to connect our employment problems with the presence of foreign workers. "But it is only realistic to recognize that people are making this kind of unreasonable attack, and to draw attention to possible tensions in society which, given certain conditions, could lead to an explosion", he said.

In particular, he asked those present to consider the bad social conditions in which foreign workers in Europe sometimes have to live: "In many cases they have remained as separate groups which have been unable to find their niche and have simply ended up in a blind alley, doing the lowest kinds of work, receiving the lowest wages, and suffering the most miserable living conditions". According to Mr. Vredeling, the most serious problem lay in the "second generation": the rapid rise in the number of children of foreign workers who, on the one hand, had been torn from their parents' country of origin, but on the other, would never put down genuine roots in the country where their parents hoped to find happiness and prosperity. Their chances of educational success were poor because of language difficulties, and they were never able to obtain a decent job. "They are brought up in an atmosphere where they are outcasts, and they will always find themselves on the fringes of society".

Mr. Vredeling said: "The distorted development brought about by the uncontrolled migration of the fifties and sixties faces society with serious consequences. It is

especially clear that on this point we need to get together and organize the situation in order to prevent things from becoming worse. Now that all the Member States of the Community have stopped immigration from outside the Community because of the employment position we have an opportunity of working out a new policy and laying down a new line of approach".

Furthermore, the Vice-President warmly defended the proposal for a directive to combat illegal migration and work which the Commission submitted last year, and which had been opposed, especially by the British Government and British Members of the European Parliament. This proposal aimed to make the promotion of and participation in illegal migration and work punishable and to offer social protection to the illegal migrants themselves.

Mr. Vredeling considered that a social problem like that of the illegal immigrant could not and must not occur any longer in the civilized world. "Such an evil must be eradicated, in the most effective and energetic way conceivable at Community level. It seems to me that a Council Resolution or a Recommendation is really not the appropriate course here. Some countries would implement the strict policy that is needed only partially or not at all. That would be not only socially unacceptable, but would also disturb economic relationships within the Community. A country which shirked its responsibilities in combating illegal immigration would continue to have a supply of cheap labour, and that would damage the competitive position of other countries which really were getting to grips with illegal immigration", said Vice-President Vredeling.

"Migrants and the E.E.C."

Speech by the Vice-president of the Commission of the E.C.

HENK VREDELING, for the Conference of the National Council  
of Social Service

- on Tuesday 27th March 1979 -

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The fact that the migration of labour within the countries of the European Community has become a focus of concern at the present time is attributable to two circumstances.

First of all, the economic recession and the unemployment have drawn the public's attention to the presence of so many migrants within our frontiers - and in a sense which is often far from positive. There are six million unemployed in the European Community and, by a strange coincidence, the number of migrants in our work force comes to about the same figure. Accordingly, for simple minds it is quite obvious that the first and best solution to the problem of unemployment would be simply to throw out the migrants. In the course of my speech I hope to make clear to you that, for all its simplicity, this solution would be especially wrong.

In the second place as regards the migration problem we are faced with the imminent enlargement of the Community of the Nine : Greece, Spain and Portugal are on the point of joining; many people think that hundreds of thousands, particularly in Spain and Portugal,

are waiting impatiently for the moment at which their country becomes a member of the enlarged Community, when they will then set out on the gold rush to the so called "rich" north, unchecked by national frontiers. But the north is not as rich as it was, and for other reasons, too, the Spanish or Portuguese migrant who wants to seek his fortune elsewhere in the Community is running a considerable risk of being grievously disappointed. I should like here to draw your attention to this danger as well.

In my opinion, however, it is worth beginning by trying to examine the phenomenon of migration more thoroughly. In the sense that we as public authorities are concerned with migration, it means the movement across national boundaries of individuals who settle in a foreign country for a shorter or longer period in order to live and work there. In this context I recognize that the definition of migrant in the United Kingdom is reduced by the concept of settler. I understand the historical reason for this. The Commission has never attempted a definition of migrant, because we believe that anyone who leaves his country to go to another country places himself in migratory situation - could be subject to discrimination. Later in my speech I shall refer to the tragic situation of the second generation of either migrants or settler as you may wish to call them. But they were in the case of the United Kingdom, born here, they are British subjects in the full legal sense and yet they are subject to serious de facto discrimination.

When the European Community was established a quarter of a century ago, we regarded the free movement of labor as the fulfilment of a great ideal.

Narrow national boundaries, which for so long had hindered the opportunities of people with initiative and a feeling for adventure, were removed. No longer did the unemployed Italian suffer the barriers of bureaucracy and work permits, to find work which was unobtainable in his own land. At last he could spread his wings - that is more or less how it went. It was an approach which fitted in well with the optimism and the unprecedented potential for economic growth at the time.

And so our frontiers were opened wide - and indeed not just the frontiers between the countries of the Community, but also the frontiers with the outside world. In the 1960's huge waves of migration got under way, not least because of our own cheerful encouragement. For in the course of the 1960's the West increasingly came to use cheap labour from outside the Community. The demand for labour grew to such an extent that foreign workers were needed in order to keep up production. But above all affluence in the West grew to such an extent that we no longer wanted to soil our hands with the dirty and unpleasant jobs which nevertheless still had to be done. For this reason too, we were only too pleased in the West to let the foreigners come.

When this development was at its height there were close on seven million migrant workers in the Community - making, together with the members of their families, more than twelve million people. Three-quarters of these workers came from outside the Community, particularly from the countries around the Mediterranean and from the developing countries: Turks, Yugoslavs, Portuguese, Algerians and Spaniards - about half a million workers altogether.

In addition, there were half a million workers of Commonwealth origin in the United Kingdom. The army of migrant workers from within the Community was 1 800 000 strong; it consisted primarily of Italians (860 000) and Irish (494 000).

Since then the Community has been hit by economic recession and unemployment, but there has been no major change in the number of foreign workers. We estimate that after 1973 the number of employed migrants fell by about 800 000; 250 000 of them became unemployed but are still in the Community, the others have left the Community.

There are still about six million employed foreigners, and if we include the members of their families we get a figure of 12.5 million people. The number of family members is increasing sharply; in 1976 the number of children of foreign workers aged between 10 and 15 was estimated at 800.000. However, it is still a fact that three-quarters of the foreign workers come from non-member countries. As regards this point too, the situation has hardly changed since 1973. The larger Community countries, the Federal Republic of Germany, France and the United Kingdom, have about the same number of foreign workers each: 1 900 000 in both West Germany and France and 1 700 000 in the United Kingdom, 450 000 of whom come from Ireland and 630 000 from the Commonwealth.

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I have already just indicated in passing that the unemployment experienced by the Community since 1974 has also affected foreign workers and to an even greater extent. In general, the unemployment figures for foreign workers are rather higher than the national average.

Really, it is not surprising that at a time of recession and unemployment tensions emerge between foreign workers and "our own" workers. Many people are beginning to regard foreigners as competitors on the labour market, where they only increase the supply of labour which is far too great already. Apparently it is easy to forget that for 20 years the foreign workers have been keeping our production going and powering our standard of living. In fact, they are still doing so; our society would soon go off the rails if all the foreign workers were suddenly to quit.

It is particularly unreasonable to connect our employment problems with the presence of foreign workers and to blame them for the consequences of these problems. But it is only realistic to recognize that people are making this kind of unreasonable attack, and to draw attention to possible tensions in society which, given certain conditions, could lead to an explosion.

This unpleasant risk is all the more acute since, in general, the foreign workers have not been given the chance - and also have not always wanted to take the chance - of integrating into western society. In many cases they have remained as separate groups which have been unable to find their niche and have simply ended up in a blind alley,

doing the lowest kind of work, receiving the lowest wages and suffering the most miserable living conditions. In this way complete ghettos have arisen in our major cities - ghettos from which the foreign workers themselves still manage to escape occasionally, but in which most of the members of their families end up permanently incarcerated. This set of circumstances, too, leads to smouldering centres of tension and conflict which can burst into flame, at any time.

In this connection I should not like to leave out of the discussion an important historical factor underlying migration from outside the Community - namely, the special links between some Member States and certain countries outside the Community, which stretch back into the distant past. This background factor is particularly apparent in France and in the United Kingdom as a result of its historical relationship with their former colonies. In your country there are no less than 631 000 workers of Commonwealth origin. At the same time the United Kingdom is certainly not alone in confronting the problems which it has in this connection. A country such as France, where there are 640 000 Africans (including 440 000 Algerians) is equally affected. The problem facing us here is a result of our colonial past. In my own country, the Netherlands, the number of people who came into the country from the overseas territories at the time of, or subsequent to, decolonization are considerably less spectacular than the numbers in the United Kingdom and France to which I have already referred, but essentially the individual phenomena of disintegration and alienation are precisely the same. It is not simply a problem of numbers, since the numbers I gave do not take into account family numbers.



Of all the problems which we created in the sixties when we permitted or were forced to permit hundreds of thousands of foreigners to come to our countries, I have still not mentioned the worst one: the problem of the second generation, the children of the foreign workers. I have already pointed out that the number of these children is growing rapidly. For many of them a hopeless situation has developed. On the one hand they have been torn for ever from their parents country of origin, but on the other they will never put down genuine roots in the country where their parents hoped to find happiness and prosperity. They will learn the language of their parents only imperfectly - in most cases, they will learn no more than the dialect of the village or region where their parents lived before emigrating. But at the same time they will never achieve a complete command of the language of the host country. As a consequence, they will rarely make much headway at school or during training. So they will never be able to obtain a decent job. They are brought up in an atmosphere where they are outcasts and will always find themselves on the fringes of society. It was for these reasons that the Commission put forward the Directive for the teaching of the language of the host country and for the continuation of contact with the language and culture of the mother country. Although it took two years for the Council to agree on this proposal, and in a limited form, I am happy that some actions are now under way.

The distorted development brought about by the uncontrolled migration of the fifties and sixties faces society with serious consequences. It is especially clear that on this point we need to

get together and organize the situation in order to prevent things from becoming worse. Now that all the Member States of the Community have virtually stopped immigration from outside the Community because of the employment position, we have an opportunity of working out a new policy. We have a breathing space which will enable us to consider the situation and lay down a new line of approach. But during this breathing space we have to recall that the citizens of the Nine continue to have the right to move freely and to seek and take up employment in another State.

Apart from this fundamental right the emphasis should be placed on preventing any return to the unrestrained disorganized waves of spontaneous migration which occurred in the past. Above all emphasis should be placed on individual position of the migrant worker. We have learned that freedom to come and go and do as one wishes may not be exalted indiscriminantly as the be all and end all of social and economic policy. Real freedom includes the chance to choose - a choice which foreign workers did not have at all when they decided to settle in our countries. The vast majority of them lived below subsistence level in their country of origin and in such circumstances there is no need to weigh up the pros and cons when the opportunity arises to move to countries where there is enough work and the streets appear to be paved with gold.

If a person has to decide whether or not to emigrate, his appraisal of the situation is only a free and independent when the standard of living and prospects for advancement are comparable in the country of origin and the country to which he plans to migrate.

Our first concern must, therefore, be to set in motion a process of regional economic development in areas from which waves of migrants are to be expected. We must offer potential migrants a future in their own countries; we must endeavour to ensure that the state of material need which forces them to emigrate no longer applies. This is also the purpose of the period of transition which the Commission wishes to observe when the new Member States, Greece, Spain and Portugal, enter the Community, before right to freedom of movement can be fully applied. The transition period must be used to create opportunities in those countries for a reasonable standard of living for those workers who, for purely material reasons, might wish to come and work in our countries.

Whatever limitations might be placed upon the movement of workers from these new Member States during a transitional period the Commission insist that these limitations must be restricted to labour market considerations. We cannot accept that the pretext of public order alone can be accepted as a further limitation. This would lead to a grave danger of Europe with first and second class citizens.

It should likewise be stressed that the new migration policy will be a real, joint European policy. The Commission took the initiative last week by submitting to the Council of Ministers comments and procedures for matters which might be part of a coordinated migration policy vis-à-vis third countries.

The need for such coordination is apparent if for example one considers the variety of arrangements and agreements which have dominated the whole migration system in the Member States. All this has led to a large heterogeneous population of migrants with varying rights in regard to employment, living and working conditions. A list of all the possibilities reveals at least seven types of migrants in the countries of the Community, that is to say,

- migrants from the present Member States of the Community;
- migrants from the new Member States;
- migrants from Associated Countries, such as Turkey;
- migrants from countries with which the Community has concluded agreements containing special provisions concerning labour, such as Yugoslavia, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria;
- migrants from other countries outside the Community with which the Community has concluded agreements not containing such provisions;
- migrants from countries with which certain Member States have special ties or bilateral agreements;
- migrants from countries which have no agreements whatsoever with the Community.

To this list we must also add illegal migrants, whom I wish to consider separately in a moment.

You may well ask what is our policy to deal with this confused situation?

It is very briefly that all migrants who work and live in our Community should be entitled to equality in regard to working and living conditions. To this end Member States should consult and coordinate their policies in regard to the entry and stay of third country migrants and their dependents.

The diverse of the migrant population makes the process of managing the labour market complex in the extreme. As integration within the Community progresses, the need for a coordinated approach to immigration from non-member countries will become increasingly evident. The universally desired revival of economic growth, towards which our policies are directed must inevitable lead to an improvement in the labour market situation. At the same time, it is highly unlikely that the situation will develop along exactly the same lines in all countries. Some will find themselves suffering from manpower shortages. In a situation where there is unemployment within the Community, including amongst immigrants from non-member countries, importing further workers from outside the Community should in my view be one of the last solutions to be considered.

We therefore need to gain some idea of numbers of workers entering the Community from non-member countries and of the trends in these migratory movements. The Commission's communication to the Council for consultation between the Member States should therefore be seen primarily as a matter of labour market policy and specifically of a labour market policy coordinated at Community level.

A pressing problem which must be considered in this broad context and one which I would like to discuss particularly here in the United Kingdom, is that of illegal migration and illegal work. But I should stress that this is not a typically British problem. France, the Federal Republic and the Netherlands also have it, as does the United States, which has to contend with legal and illegal immigrants from Mexico and the Caribbean.

It is a problem that, by its very nature, cannot be measured precisely in quantitative terms; illegal migrants are not, by definition, registered. It is estimated that about 10% of foreign workers reside and work illegally in the countries of the Community - that is to say about six hundred thousand people.

It is also difficult to determine how serious the question is in qualitative terms. What we can say is that all the less pleasant aspects of the fate of foreign workers hit illegal workers twice as hard. Illegal immigrants have literally no real rights whatsoever and are thus vulnerable from all sides. Since the threat of immediate expulsion from the country in which they are staying, looms over them at all times, they are defenceless against all forms of blackmail and exploitation. Their circumstances are inhumane in the true sense of the word.

It is perfectly obvious that this question must be dealt with urgently, primarily for social reasons. The Commission made a proposal for a directive on the matter about a year ago, which

- firstly, makes all those who organize, encourage or participate in illegal migration or illegal work liable to penalties and, in particular, makes employers who make use of illegal work face up to their responsibilities;
- secondly, offers social protection to the illegal immigrants themselves; although their position is not regularized, they are assured social security and the guaranteed minimum income for the period that they have been employed in a Member State of the Community,

even though illegally. The main purpose of the latter provision is to make it unattractive for employers to employ illegal immigrants: henceforth they will not be cheaper than other workers who are in the country legally.

Meanwhile, this proposal appears to have encountered difficulties in the Council of Ministers and I do not think I am betraying any secrets when I say that the Government of the United Kingdom, in particular, not to mention the British members of the European Parliament have opposed it. I find this difficult to understand when, for instance, I consider the remarks in the report of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration to the effect that:

"Any level of illegal immigration, which is often organized and financially lucrative for the operators, should be prevented by all possible means" and "operators profit generally from exploiting the poorer and less literate aspiring immigrants".

To quote again from the same source:

"All West European countries experience this kind of illegal immigration". This is a problem for the Community - one that goes beyond the boundaries of a single Member State. We also appear to have common objectives, as can be seen from the Select Committee's recommendation that the Government "should introduce measures to provide effective sanctions against employers who knowingly employ overstayers and illegal immigrants".

There is also a substantial measure of agreement on the question of social protection. I am pleased to note that there are plans afoot to making monitoring effective. For my part, I could envisage a check on employers documents.

As early as February, 1977 Mr. Merlyn Rees said in a statement in the House of Commons, "The taking of employment contrary to conditions imposed on entry - which is by no means confined to people from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan - has been of concern not only to the Government but to the T.U.C. and is currently under discussion in the E.E.C. Methods of ensuring that all applicants for employment are entitled to take it will be discussed with both sides of industry. I am also investigating the extent of overstaying by people admitted for temporary purposes. Action in these areas should do a lot to put an end to abuses of the existing system. On all these matters, the Government will give further information to the House in the near future".

This, I cannot agree more, is a matter left to the Member Governments. Every country, including of course the United Kingdom, has its own system. The ways and means are not crucial so long as the end result is the same. I really cannot emphasize this point too strongly, as I think there may be some misunderstanding in this connection either now or in the future.

May I also say that I am fully conscious that those ways and means must not be incompatible with the fundamental rights of the individual in regard to non-discriminatory treatment and human rights in general.

It was reported, for example, that our proposal for the Directive contained the requirement that all persons would need to carry identity cards to make checking possible. Well, I can assure you that nowhere in our whole proposal is there a single word about identity cards or the like.



If objections of this type are the only ones - if it is merely a question of finding together an acceptable and responsible form of supervision - then I think the problems can be solved. Ultimately, the important thing is that in discussing the proposal for the Directive we agree on the main principle, and that is that a social problem like that of the illegal immigrant cannot and must not occur in the civilized world.

Such an evil must be eradicated, in the most effective and energetic way conceivable at Community level. It seems to me that the a non binding instrument like a Council Resolution or a Recommendation is not the appropriate course here. Some countries would implement the strict policy that is needed only partially or not at all. That would be not only socially unacceptable, but would also disturb economic relationships within the Community. A country which shirked its responsibilities in combating illegal immigration would continue to have a supply of cheap labour, and that would damage the competitive position of other countries which really were getting to grips with illegal immigration.

After a first exchange of views with the Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs, I have arranged that we will hold more detailed consultations about our proposal with the United Kingdom Government to dispel misconceptions and clarify our intentions. I sincerely hope that, in the further discussions in the Council, these misconceptions will prove to no longer exist.