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I. Introduction

Council of Europe

Intergovernmental organization, not controlled by the EU. 47 Member States.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (APCE) – parliamentary organ of the CoE composed of 318 MPs from the 47 national parliaments, working in 10 Committees.

PYLB: currently preparing a report on educational and cultural networks of communities living abroad for the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and the Media.

Longstanding work of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons related to migrant diasporas:

→ underlining the **need for greater political participation of migrants** as a way to increase their capacity to promote and transfer democratic values;

→ recommending that Member States should elaborate migration policies and promote an **institutional role for diasporas**.

PYLB report to complement this work looking at diaspora communities from a cultural perspective. Two core questions: how can cultural networks of European diaspora communities help people enjoy, preserve and transmit their culture – i.e. build up a sense of community – while at the same time assisting their integration into the society of their country of residence – i.e. promote inclusion, involvement in public and social life and democratic citizenship?

Concept of “diaspora”:

Diasporas are generally dispersed, diffuse, unrepresented and largely invisible.

Term covers all people who maintain some **form of attachment to a specific country of origin** in relation to their migration background:

“a community of individuals living together on the same territory and having in common the conviction or belief of belonging, themselves or their families, to another territory with which they maintain regular relations.”

It includes several generations of migrants, some with the citizenship of the country of residence, others with multiple nationalities.

“Living together” in Europe: the critical role of diaspora communities

Important role of diaspora communities in building up a **sense of community** and **bridging different cultures** is not sufficiently understood nor recognised.

There is very little research assessing cultural and social impact of diaspora communities:

→ becoming an **urgent political priority** in Europe, as tensions and insecurity grow in society, deepening the divide between communities (linguistic, cultural or religious differences)

Important political choices:

Whether to strengthen integration and national identity or to build social cohesion on the basis of cultural diversity and positive interaction?

Cultural diversity is an inevitable social reality. The question remains as to **how to treat it positively**. (Carlos Costa Neves).

In this context voluntary-sector diaspora organizations and associations at large:

- provide a link to the culture of origin -> create platform for support, solidarity, mutual assistance and interaction;
- nurture multilingualism and plural identities.

Yet, there is a risk of segregation if the country of residence doesn't approach them openly and fail to team up with them as a partner.

New Policies needed to build up synergies

What kind of policies should be developed in the fields of culture, education and youth at local, national and European level?

Countries of residence need to:

- open up a dialogue with diaspora communities;
- help young migrants of the 2. and 3. generations connect with countries of origin of their parents and grandparents;
- develop systematic policies and partnerships with diaspora organizations.

Countries of origin could largely benefit from stronger ties with expatriate communities in:

- contributing with investments, transfer of knowledge, new cultural models and skills to socio-economic development;
- developing closer cultural, economic and political links with other countries.

II. Current research: Educational and cultural networks of communities living abroad

Aims of the report:

- analyze and evaluate forms of support and partnership between public authorities and diaspora communities;
→ by reaching out to diaspora organizations and communities and contacting national and local authorities in the countries of residence;
- improve coordination and exchange with them in a systematic manner;
- create a basis for a common policy on European diasporas at Council of Europe and European Union level.

Study diaspora organizations

In contact with over 35 social, political and cultural diaspora associations, religious communities and Saturday schools representing diasporas from 17 European countries.

Partnership with the non-governmental federation of national associations for residents abroad
“Europeans throughout the World”

Questionnaire: 7 open-ended questions, focusing on:

1. Links of the organization with other organizations, the country of residence and the country of origin;
2. Activities and projects of the organization, especially regarding integration and identification;
3. Expectations and suggestions for political cooperation with diasporas on the local, national and European level.

Particular focus on Turkish, German, Portuguese, Italian, Croatian, Maltese, Latvian and Albanian diaspora associations.

→ Represent different kinds of migration; historic migration, labor migration, individual mobility, within and from outside the EU, generating different forms of organization and networking activities.

Preliminary Results

Mostly cultural and social associations have contributed enthusiastically → offer various activities and services, including:

1. **Platforms for exchange and networking:** celebration of traditional festivals and public holidays; festivals focusing on the culture of the country of origin such as film, dance and music festivals; meetings and conferences:

→ many events are open to members of local societies, creating cultural bridges and demonstrating the added value of diaspora communities and migration;

2. **Educational activities:** language tuition; courses in cultural history, customs, traditions etc.; summer schools/camps (in the country of origin) and exchanges:

→ addressing 2. and 3. generation migrants in particular, keeping them from losing ties with the culture, language and society of the country of origin of their family;

→ e.g. association of German Saturday Schools UK: bilingual/-national children which are much less exposed to German and would lose their skills language without special tuition.

3. **Counseling and assistance:** information transfer, support for recently arrived migrants, legal advice, mediation between migrants and (local) authorities as well as employers, translation, workshops and seminars facilitating adaptation to the new society:

→ serve as a first point of contact; easier to reach out to than Embassies or Consulates ;

→ special focus on distributing information on themes relevant to the diaspora (local events, practical tips etc.), using modern media; many organizations regularly send out newsletters, maintain detailed websites and some publish newspapers, magazines and other publications.

Large majority of organizations promotes integration while resisting assimilation:

→ Main goal: create a positive bicultural identity by establishing a close social link to the country of residence without losing the connection to the country of origin and its culture.

Some organizations pursue political objectives; especially **umbrella organizations** which either represent a specific diaspora community in the country of residence, **fostering participation** and reinforcing the voice of migrants in national debates:

→ generally accepted and supported by the country of residence, sometimes even financially, or they represent diaspora citizens in their country of origin. mainly pursue **lobby activities**

→ in close direct contact with national parliaments and the respective government (e.g. Nordic countries), often receive subsidies from them.

Smaller associations, acting on the local level, usually maintain less intensive links with authorities in the country of residence and the country of origin, are less visible and rarely receive any funding:

→ Some of them (Turkish, Romanian) neither wish to depend on nor to be associated with the country of origin; fear of political interference, feel closer to the values of the host country;

Issues regarding funding and recognition: most associations are dissatisfied with their financial situation. If they receive public funding, it is usually project based, requiring a complicated and time-consuming application

→ no means to plan ahead, nor to establish sustainable structures.

Policies of European countries towards their own diaspora vary considerably/

- some introduced strategies and funds to ensure their political participation (e.g. MPs representing the diaspora in national parliaments in France, Italy and Portugal);
- others don't have any structures to support citizens abroad (especially the UK and Germany)
→ associations representing the respective diaspora are hardly recognized and even less supported by the government of the country of origin; no grounds for cooperation.

Ideas to improve policies regarding European Diasporas

Most organizations wish to reinforce co-operation among associations in the same and in different countries of residence as well as between countries at European level.

→ see a great need to foster tolerance and awareness for the benefits of cultural diversity

Suggestions put forward by associations:

1. **Creating platforms for exchange:** promote concept of cooperation networks to share experiences and best practices, through
 - direct exchanges and meetings at national and European level;
 - informal contact, based on easily accessible materials that should be collected, administered and distributed by European/CoE institutions; particular importance of online platforms, easy to access and cost-effective; could distribute general information on funding and requirements of associations, material for cultural programs, studies on the experiences of specific communities
2. **Reinforcing the political representation of diaspora communities:**

Concepts of “diaspora” and “expatriate” should be fully integrated in European policies, which should be mutualized (e.g. regarding welfare, foreign policy, language policy).

Strengthening situation and status by:

- appointing central authorities for diaspora communities at national and European level (specific EU Commissioner responsible for European expats);
 - electing MPs representing diaspora communities into all parliaments;
 - establishing expatriate councils within local municipalities;
 - allocating percentage of European funds to diaspora communities, making them more visible and easier accessible.
3. **Coordinating projects:** using “*Europeans throughout the World*” as a framework, extending cooperation within the network:

- providing general information for all expats;
e.g. Romanian association in Belgium “Rombel” made a proposal at the ETTW to develop an “EU expat guide”, following the example of their guide for Romanian expats;
- encouraging local diaspora communities to work together
e.g. Multicultural Language Centre Rhodes, initiated by local authorities, uniting associations and language centers from 7 European countries in one building;
- promoting online language courses already developed by several associations.

Conclusions

Study on associations and information provided by integration authorities clearly confirm positive effects of voluntary-sector diaspora organizations on integration.

Many of the approached organizations actively seek cooperation, but they often lack sufficient and sustainable structures, funding and human resources.

Question of how to coordinate and mutualize their activities on the European level remains.

Action taken by the Council of Europe would have a wide reach, provided that the right framework to reinforce cooperation and coordination is in place.