

Living Together - Equal Opportunity and Access in Society

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Speech of HRH Prince Radu of Romania, Special Representative of the Romanian Government, at the International Summit of the British Council
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Mr Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To be here today is a pleasure indeed and a source of hope. Taking part in the launch of the British Council Living Together programme, under the auspices of the Council of Europe and during the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue is a wonderful opportunity for somebody coming from my part of the world.

It is also a perfect context to talk about the impact of migration on home and host societies, since Romania is a European space that experienced this phenomenon in about every single epoch of its history, especially in the modern and contemporary times.

A mixture of Western roots (Latin) and Eastern faith (Orthodox) makes Romania a ground of rich and complementary culture. Also, despite the overwhelming majority of Romanian ethnics (89,5%), Romania has always been a model of confluence. In the historic provinces of Banat (Western Romania) and Dobrogea (South-eastern Romania) it is common to meet local communities including up to 14 different minorities.

As a member of the Royal House of Romania and as a Special Representative of the Romanian Government, in the last seven years I have constantly been in touch with local communities at home and abroad. I developed projects such as “Local Romania”, “The Europe of Regions Initiative” or “The USA Friendship Tour”. I tried, throughout meetings and actions, to put together

and to encourage local economic initiative, local administration, young people's education, civil society and minorities contribution to the society.

Today, after having visited every single corner of my country, of my region and most of my continent, a few conclusions became obvious to me:

One regards the extraordinary number of people who leave Eastern Europe in search of a better paid job abroad or of a better education in Western universities. Most of these people are young. This brings to the home society the benefit of an immediate better standard of life for their families. Today, 2 million Romanians work in Spain and Italy, send money to their families and increase, on a short and medium term, their living horizon. Their children have a better school and better holidays, while adults modernize their mentality and transfer, on their return, a new standard of life onto the whole community. Into the host societies, they often bring a new energy, enthusiasm and flexibility, a plus of adaptability and motivation, beneficial to the host society. In my last visit to Spain, I was told that Romanian children in primary schools are the most active, the most motivated in their class and often they learn Spanish language quicker and better than the Spanish children.

Another conclusion is that these people become earlier Europeans than our people at home. They are obliged to speak a foreign language, a largely absent skill in Western Europe; to adapt to a different model of society, culture and traditions, which is one of the goals of the European Union (unity in diversity); to learn to have a community role, in contrast with the Oriental Europe's tradition to over-cultivate the sense of family. A simple example: in Spain, in Castilla La Mancha Region alone, a number of 84 Romanian civic associations were created in two years, composed by young people who never before performed such activities at home.

A fundamental topic of today's reality in Europe is the Intercultural dialogue. I can testify that the gap between Eastern and Western Europe culture and traditions is still consistent. Supranational institutions, shared values and the *aquis communautaire* are fundamental, but do not solve the entire issue. Also, intelligence does not replace wisdom, information does not mean knowledge, mass-media cannot replace dictionaries and democracy and freedom do not bring automatically the sense of responsibility, generosity, loyalty to a cause and the power of personal example. It is sometimes amazing to see how, despite the extraordinary tools we possess today, despite the historical moment of extending the Europe Union over an important part of the geography and culture of our

continent, we still behave, on both parts, as if we were co-existing, and not living together.

Tens of thousands of young Romanians are students in foreign universities, from Britain to Japan and from Australia and Singapore to Chile. This is a blessing for the European Union, for Romania, for the international system and organizations promoting living together.

There is still so much to learn about our part of Europe: what are our needs, our fears, our energies and expectations. Europe does not exploit yet the amazing capacity of young generations of Eastern Europe to speak foreign languages, to assimilate globalization; their fantastic capacity to adapt to the new, their phenomenal skills to use technology and to transform into economic and scientific benefit information and freedom. Let us think for a moment of two young Romanian artists, who are highly appreciated in Britain: the soprano Angela Gheorghiu and the ballerina Alina Cojocaru. They are both born in modest towns of Romania, in modest families and in a type of society that usually receives lessons from everywhere. It would be so much more useful if we tried, as we do today, to consider causes and not only to analyse effects.

Those who decide to live or learn abroad will always be a step ahead the others in the intercultural dialogue; they will cultivate living together values; they will be a living bridge between Western and Eastern Europe. They will also be a source of energy, an example of flexibility and adaptability and a added value to the existing talent, intellectual capacity and knowledge of the home society. Ultimately, they will be the best advocates and the best sources of understanding of their own homeland and local cultures, traditions and societies.

Living together is putting together hope, understanding, generosity, sense of responsibility, and the power of personal example.