This international conference was organised as the project kickoff for the three-year European Initiative for Migration and Development (CoMiDe). It brought together more than 150 participants from the project partner countries Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia and Italy, as well as experts from Senegal, Ghana and Germany for one and a half days of intensive discussions about the complex issues related to the conference theme.

The conference was opened by Brigitte Öppinger-Walchshofer from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), who underlined the importance of the conference topic for ADA and said that there should be more coherence between migration and development policies at the EU level. Walter Posch from VIDC welcomed the interest expressed by ADA (despite financial constraints), and Elfriede Schachner from Südwind Agentur pointed out in her opening remarks that the public debate treats migration as a phenomenon somewhere between threat and potential.

In her input statement, Madjiguène Cissé from the Réseau des femmes pour le Développement durable en Afrique, Senegal, said that parallels between migration and development can be seen throughout the history of humanity, and that there is a contradiction between the “problem” of migration on the one hand and increasing global integration on the other. She stressed the importance of exchanges to establish intercultural harmony and described the situation in some African countries which does little to support development, but does encourage migration. Ms. Cissé presented several women’s projects that aim at a strong civil society with prominent roles for women.

Thomas Faist from the University of Bielefeld, Germany, outlined how the public debate about migration and developed has evolved since the 1960s. While migration is not a driver of economic development, he said, economic development in the migrants’ countries of origin does have an impact on them – for example, by making it easier for them to return to their home country. With respect to remittances and their effects, Mr. Faist said that a fresh look and a re-evaluation are required. In his view, the overall effect of migration is to enhance trends, both positive and negative ones, and while migrants are currently being cast in the new role of “social agents”, this is in sharp contrast with highly restrictive migration policies.

Gabriel Keramarics from the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs spoke about the role of UN organizations with respect to migration, Tanja Dedovic from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) described the activities of the IOM, which was originally established for refugees from Europe, and Marjan Huč from Slovenian Global Action (SLOGA) discussed the situation in Slovenia and the visa problems of partners wishing to travel to Europe in the context of exchange programmes.
Mignane Diouf from Conseil des ONG d’Appui au Développement, Senegal, underlined that migration is a human right. He said that African governments are primarily responsible for creating opportunities for the African people and for involving them in local decision-making; on the other hand, the fact that many Africans see no other chance than to migrate to Europe is caused by the difficult economic situation – and for this, negative effects of European policies are in part to blame. Citing the example of Senegal, Mr. Diouf said that droughts and overfishing there were caused by industrialized agriculture relying on Western-style monocultures and the activities of EU fishery fleets.

Alex Asiedu from the Department of Geography and Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana, described migration flows from and to Ghana. Migration is often informal and thus inadequately documented, with most Ghanaian emigrants today going to Europe and the US. The rising volume of remittances is above all noticeable in housing construction. Conversely, there are also significant migration flows into Ghana. In 1960, about 12% of the country’s population were not born Ghanaians. However, there is no comprehensive national migration policy, and the institutional framework is underdeveloped. One consequence is a lack of reliable data on migration. More cooperation is urgently required, both at the national and the international level.

Nadja Schuster and Marlene Keusch from VIDC presented a study which they prepared in the context of the CoMiDe project. Entitled “European Good Practice Examples of Migration and Development Initiatives with a Particular Focus on Diaspora Engagement”, the paper gives cases studies of nine good practice examples, two of which – the EC-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiative and the French-Moroccan “Migration et Développement” project – were described in greater detail at the conference. The latter is the only initiative in the field which is managed exclusively by migrants. Among other things, the two authors concluded that diaspora organizations should be recognized as stakeholders in development policy and should be supported, for example through capacity-building. Awareness-raising and knowledge transfer were also seen as important factors, and the speakers stressed that an “open” definition of development is needed.

Andrea Riester from the German association Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) presented a pilot programme which GIZ has run since 2007 to support associations that are mainly led and represented by migrants. Alexis Nshimyimana Neuberg from the Afrika Vernetzungsplattform (AVP) remarked critically on the conditions for public subsidies, saying that high requirements for own contributions make it impossible for diaspora organisations to successfully apply for public co-finance. She also underlined the importance of know-how transfers and presented the Kenako project, which sought to educate the Austrian public about the African continent, using the occasion of the 2010 Football World Championship in South Africa. Kenako was the first project in which migrants’ and development policy organizations from all over Austria cooperated in a joint effort.

Bernardo Venturi from the University of Bologna emphasized the importance of local authorities in his remarks and said that a human-rights-based approach is essential to avoid paternalism.
Following these input presentations, three workshops were held on specific topics: “Southern Perspective on Migration & Development”, “Diaspora Engagement in Development Cooperation”, and “Public Authorities' Role in Migration and Development”. The workshop participants defined concrete demands which they addressed to all involved stakeholders:

- “Development” needs to be redefined in a dialogue with the South; the “recipients” themselves should be the ones to define what improved quality of life means for them.
- NGOs and diaspora organizations have to cooperate systematically and in a structured manner.
- Public authorities are called upon to support campaigns and initiatives aimed at ensuring coherence between migration and development – through appropriate immigration and residence laws, and also by committing publicly to the creation of this coherence.

Following up on the conference, the CoMiDe initiative will work with all involved stakeholders to further elaborate these demands and objectives and to pursue strategies aimed at broader dissemination of the demands and acceptance for the necessity of coherence between migration and development policies. To this end, more workshops with stakeholders and decision-makers will be organized, as well as panel discussions and an event for the exchange of ideas and concepts.

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