

by Catalin GROSU

Bucharest City Hall, ROMANIA

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the organizers for inviting me to this conference, it is a privilege and an honor for me to be here, I convey my special thanks to IOM Office in Romania who has been incredibly supportive in getting me here, and for that I am very grateful indeed.

My short speech will refer to recent developments in Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, a country well known for its history of tolerance and peaceful living together for more than 20 ethnic groups.

Out of approximately 60,000 immigrants in Romania, from more than 120 non-EU countries, Bucharest is home for a third of them, due to its attractiveness: highest income per capita, a steadily decreasing unemployment rate, a large number of small and medium businesses.

In this framework, the Municipality of Bucharest partnered with 9 other cities: Dublin (Ireland), Munich (Germany), Cartagena and Getxo (Spain), Lisbon (Portugal), London (UK), Reggio Emilia (Italy), Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Vienna (Austria) and has just finalized the implementation of a year and a half long European project on *migrant entrepreneurs*, the first of its kind in the hands of the local authority ... whose Coordinator I have become, for reasons I will point out later on.

Named *Diversity in the Economy and Local integration* – DELI, the project aimed to strengthen the public-private dialogue, improve the local environment for economic integration of migrants and support migrant entrepreneurs.

The project struck Bucharest with *a clear sense of purpose*, because:

The workshops and round tables in the project were attended by all key actors from the central and local levels: the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, the representatives of Small and Medium Enterprises Ministry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Agency for Labor, the National Council for Refugees, Ministry of Interior / General Inspectorate for Immigration, bilateral chambers of commerce, NGOs and business associations of ethnic groups living in Bucharest.

Nevertheless, although Romania was not affected by the recent wave of mixed migration into Europe, laying down the basis of a permanent public-private dialogue between the aforementioned has proven to be a difficult task for two main reasons: firstly, there is a lack of skilled human resources willing to become involved in Diversity issues on behalf of public

institutions, due to the low level of wages compared to the required education level, better paid on the free market; and this is how an International Relations expert from the city hall became the leader of a Migration project; secondly, one of the key stakeholders, the banking system, did not attend any of the project meetings, due to lack of interest in this type of exercise , id.est. involving migrants with little or no banking history.

On the contrary, the project was highly welcomed by the civil society and migrant groups, which had been reluctant before the DELI moment to develop relations with the local public authority, Fortunately for me, for the project and for the city, the public authority, through the voices of its mayor and the City Council, has embraced the outcomes of DELI and decided to continue raising awareness of both *its citizens* and *people with a migrant background*. The first measure in place was the creation of a new branch of its Public Relations Office focused on employing and training young and diverse people, with the help of the migrant communities, support from Bucharest universities and in cooperation with most active NGOs identified through DELI.

In its endeavors, the City takes into account at least two priority pillars of migrant integration:

- 1) strategic planning and the initiation of public policies dedicated to the harmonious integration of foreigners , and
- 2) offering additional support (to access the national education system) for minors and adults with a migrant background to learn Romanian.

A big step forward will be the accession of Bucharest, this very week, to the Intercultural Cities Network, at the invitation recently received from the Council of Europe. The concept was developed in 2004, and the best practices emerging from the experience of the member cities will allow Bucharest to improve communication with all migrant communities in the city, encourage formal and informal exchanges between population groups with different cultural backgrounds, increase participation of migrants in the public decision making process, provide a positive public image of Diversity and a better understanding of *diversity advantage*.

I certainly hope that the ideas and best practices coming out of this Conference will offer additional clarity and the necessary stimulus to the political and administrative leaders in Bucharest, in order to build **now** efficient policies and response mechanisms for what **tomorrow** could become an urgent need in the region.

Thank you very much for your attention!