

Welcome speech by José Manuel Paca, President of the Advisory Council for Foreigners of Erfurt, Capital of Thuringia

Dear inhabitants of Erfurt,

As a President of the Advisory Council for Foreigners of the Capital of Thuringia, Erfurt, I would like to invite you to have a glance at its work and to get informed of its structures and activities.

When the first Advisory Council of Eastern Germany has been elected in 1992, it was a milestone within a long and complicated integration process of the foreigners in social life and a realisation process of their legitimate claiming of equality in rights and of active co-operation in the organisation. The Advisory Council is legally anchored in the community law of Thuringia as the representation of migrants' interests and as an advisory organ for the Town Board, town administration and all other competent committees of the Capital of Thuringia.

I remember that at the beginnings Advisory Council's work was considered with a critical, sometimes even distrustful look. Meanwhile, the Advisory Council is recognised as an effective, confident, competent and politically responsible partner. Its work is underlined as a token of approval by the democratic parties, associations, groups and administrative services. Without the action of the Advisory Council, the effort of integration and acceptance of the migrants by the majority of the society on one side and the struggle against xenophobia and discrimination on the other side would be organised in a much more complicated way. Thus, the Advisory Council has turned to an important link in order to live together peacefully in Erfurt.

When the Advisory Council formed itself in 1992, the founder members did not suspect how much wide and manifold the duties would be organised in the future. Nowadays there is scarcely one social field, about which our opinion is not asked for. We tackle practical community policy themes. Here I think of the right to vote for the community elections by the foreigners who have been living for a longer time and who are not citizens of the European Union. A main line, not to say a permanent challenge, remains the organisation of integration: it handles with social questions, medical care, training, equality of opportunity at school and at work, family reunion, asylum and access to the labour market. Moreover, the Advisory Council takes part in numerous integration projects.

And in the coming times, there is still much to do.

We strive to improve our work - according to the requirements of our time.

Dear inhabitants of Erfurt, we invite you to co-operate.

José Manuel Paca