EUROPEAN IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN CHANGE

ABSTRACT

This article charts the changing direction of European states' immigrant integration policies. Based on a close reading of a key European Union document in this area, the author discusses the questions of consensus on an inclusive understanding of integration as a "two-way" process; of lowered emphasis on cultural recognition and expected respect on the part of migrants for the principles of liberal democracy; puts strong focus on getting migrants into work; and explores the rise of compensatory anti-discrimination policies. Particular emphasis is given to the strange coexistence of obligatory "civic integration" and remedial "antidiscrimination" policies, which very much constitute the *Gestalt* of the contemporary integration scene.

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Half a century after the onset of the great post-World War II migrations, there is a widespread sense across Europe that the State policies that were established to accommodate these migrations were insufficient or even harmful. Even in states that were long believed to adhere to articulate and coherent "national models" of immigrant integration, such as "multicultural" Netherlands or "assimilationist" France, this sense of failure is strong. In the Netherlands, a parliamentary inquiry of government policy towards ethnic minorities between 1970 and 2000 came to the devastating conclusion that, if some migrants in the Netherlands succeeded, then it was "in spite of" rather than "thanks to" government policy.[1] In France, a similar review of the French postwar immigration experience by the Cour des Comptes noted that State attention had always been fixated on refining instruments of immigration control, while integration policies remained "badly defined in their objectives and principles," "incoherent," "contradictory," and "insufficient" (Cour des Comptes 2004, 9f).

A key feature of the policy solutions that have been offered in response to the integration crisis is the weakening of national distinctiveness and a convergence with respect to the forms and contents of integration policy. The notion of "national models" no longer makes sense, if it ever did. Gary Freeman rightly noted in this respect that the notion of "national models of incorporation…lend(s) too much dignity to the patchwork of institutions, laws, and practices that constitute incorporation frameworks in the West" (Freeman 2003, 3). The French auto-critique by the Cour des Comptes powerfully confirms this view. Even in the more chaotic and less philosophical ways that national distinctiveness existed in the past, it is now counteracted by the trend toward convergence across Europe, on which I shall expand in the following.

Policy convergence in the European Union

Unique windows into the changing direction of integration policies in Europe are the November 2004 European Council conclusions on "immigrant integration policy" (Council of the European Union 2004). Because they were agreed upon by the Justice and Home Ministers of the EU member states, these conclusions reflect national policy preferences in Europe; they show these preferences under the sway of convergence. A general feature of these policies, which is in fact no novelty, is to be "broadly if imperfectly inclusive" (Freeman 2003, 3). As Freeman points out, this is "counter-intuitive," if one considers that many of Europe's migrants arrived and continue to arrive uninvited, and that national electorates are generally hostile to large-scale immigration, especially of non-European provenience. This inclusiveness is due to the post-war rise of a human rights discourse and accompanying international and national legal regimes, which have extended rights from national citizens to all "persons," irrespective of citizenship (Soysal 1994). It is thus not a European specificity but is rather germane to all Western liberal democracies.

Inclusiveness is usually formulated in the metaphor of "two-way" integration. Accordingly, the *first* of the EU's "common basic principles" of immigrant integration policy reads: "Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of the Member States" (Council of the European Union 2004, 19). This means that not only migrants must change, but that receiving societies must evolve as well, as they are mandated to create "the opportunities for the immigrants' full economic, social, cultural, and political participation" (*ibid.*).

This stance has become a platitude, but one should not forget its extreme improbability. Ever since the transition from nomadic to sedentary life in the Neolithic Revolution, the maxim that settled populations have repeated to newcomers was to adapt to their ways – "when in Rome do as the Romans do." The idea that something as complex and massive as the receiving society – a "society" after all and not just "people" – should change in response to the arrival of numerically inferior "migrants" is unheard of. That a settled society *would* change as a result of migration is of course inevitable, but elevating this into an ethical maxim, a *should*, is an unprecedented stance.

The *second* of the EU's "common basic principles" offers insight into what is expected on the part of migrants: "Integration implies respect for the basic values of the European Union." What are these values? The answer is: the joint stock of all liberal democracies, "the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law" (p. 19). All these are political values, not substantive ethical values. Europe is becoming like America, in the sense that, much as Rawls' "political liberalism" has formulated it, the integration of society can only occur in terms of a procedural consensus on what is "right," not in terms of a substantive consensus on what is "good." Political liberalism's application in the migration domain is a common preference for "integration" over "assimilation" – assimilation had meant imposing the substantive culture of the majority society ("comprehensive doctrine," in Rawls' terms) on newcomers, while the precise meaning of integration is to abstain from this. Accordingly, the EU's "common basic principles" include "(f)ull respect for the immigrants' and their descendants' own language and culture" (p. 20).

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With respect to migrants' "own language and culture," the crucial question is whether their expression is left to the free play of society, or whether the State becomes involved in their protection and maintenance. Interestingly, only Spain, under a socialist government bent on setting a progressive counterpoint to its conservative predecessor, wanted to commit the EU states to a "multicultural" stance on this question, obliging them to proactively further and protect migrant languages and cultures.[2] This quest was rebutted. The compromise formula, "full respect," does not go beyond the classic liberal stance on matters of culture and way of life, leaving them to the discretion of individuals, and not considering them the business of the State. Moreover, when the Council document reiterated that "the freedom to practice one's religion and culture" was guaranteed by constitutional law, emphasis was put on the strings attached to it – respect for the "equality of women," the "rights and interests of children," and the "freedom to practice or not to practice a particular religion" (p. 23). This reservation reflects the most recent difficulties with Muslim integration in Europe. As a result, the pendulum has swung from cultural maintenance to enforcement of liberal core values.

The lowered emphasis on cultural recognition in the EU document, while at one level consistent with the precepts of liberalism, points to an important reorientation of European states' immigrant integration policies. Previous programmatic statements by European states were much louder in affirming the integrity of migrant cultures and ways of life, and some states – most notably Sweden and the Netherlands – went even further in protecting and supporting them. Instead, the *third* of the EU's "common basic principles" reads: "Employment is a key part of the integration process" (p. 20). Responding to an alarming degree of unemployment and welfare dependency among immigrants and their offspring in Europe, socio-economic integration has become the key focus of European states' immigrant integration policies. This is in sharp contrast to the United States or Canada, where migrant ethnics are generally in work. This reorientation is framed by a new, post-national-model philosophy of migrants' "self-sufficiency" and "autonomy," to be found in the Netherlands and France alike, according to which – paradoxically – the primary task of the State is to make migrants independent of the State.

The inevitable result of the new focus on socio-economic integration is to heavily shift the burden of adjustment toward the individual migrant, particularly in the first phases of entering the new society. Accordingly, the *fourth* principle in the EU statement on integration policy says: "Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration." This refers to the new policy of civic integration, which the Netherlands pioneered in the late 1990s, and which has since been adopted, among other European states, by Finland, Denmark, Austria, Germany, and France. This policy obliges newcomers to enrol in civics and language courses immediately after entry (and in the Netherlands lately, even before entry), and non-compliance tends to be sanctioned through financial penalties or denial of permanent residence permits. The novelty of civic integration policy is its obligatory character, which has notably increased over time. This notional "integration" policy has even transmuted into a tool of migration control, helping states to especially restrict the entry of unskilled and unadapted family migrants. The obligatory, repressive character of civic integration policy makes it a prime instance of an illiberal policy "in the name of liberalism" (King 1999), which sets it apart from similar – yet voluntary and humanitarian – civic integration policies in Canada.

However, a gentle counterpoint to increasingly harsh civic integration policies is the parallel emphasis on anti-discrimination laws and policies, which – forced by the EU Race Directive of June 2000 – are now taking hold across Europe. Accordingly, the *last* of the EU's integration principles that shall be mentioned here is: "Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration" (Council of the European Union 2004, 21).[3] Equality of treatment, irrespective of one's ethnic origin or any other ascriptive marker, is certainly the stock-in-trade of all liberal societies and guaranteed by their constitutions. Yet to enforce this by explicit anti-discrimination laws, which lowers the hurdle of claims making for the victims of discrimination and – above all – expands the reach of the nondiscrimination principle from the public to the private sector, is a novelty in Europe. Though enabled by a unique window of opportunity at EU level (see Guiraudon 2004), the proliferation of anti-discrimination laws and policies reflects Europe's structural transformation into a multiethnic society, as well as a general willingness to tackle the specific inequalities that go along with it.

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Repressive liberalism

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of the contemporary European immigrant integration scene is the joint rise of civic integration and anti-discrimination policies. While they are at one level complementary in focusing on different phases of the integration process, both policies follow opposite logics. The logic of civic integration is to treat migrants as individuals, who are responsible for their own integration; civic integration is application to the migration domain of the austere neo-liberalism that frames economic globalization. The opposite logic of anti-discrimination is to depict migrants and their offspring as members of groups who are victimized by the majority society, thus reintroducing at the tail end of integration the ameliorative group logic that had been thrown out at its beginning by the harsh individualism of civic integration. The strange coexistence of civic integration and anti-discrimination reveals that the liberal mantra of "two-way" integration consists of two separate one-way processes: at first, the burden of change rests solely on the migrant; later, it rests exclusively on society.

The coexistence of civic integration and anti-discrimination in contemporary European immigrant integration policies reveals the workings of two opposite types of liberalism: an "old" liberalism of equality and individual rights, which has moved states from "assimilation" to "integration" and is now feeding the trend toward anti-discrimination policies; and a "new" liberalism of disciplinary individualism, which, as one can see in obligatory civic integration, is coercing individuals to release their self-producing and self-regulating capacities as alternative to redistribution and public welfare that fiscally diminished states can no longer deliver.

To further flesh out the contours of the "new" liberalism, consider the centrality of employment in Europe's current immigrant integration policies. As the European Commission observed in its first Annual Report on Migration and Integration, "access to employment" has become "the most important political priority within national integration policies" (European Commission 2004, 5). This priority is as old as the hills, consonant with Brecht's belly-centered ethic of *Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral*. However, on a more subtle level this also displays a novel sense of "integration" in the post-national state, as "social inclusion," which is in itself subordinate to the exigencies of globalization. In the European Union, for instance, the "combat" against "social exclusion" is not free-standing but tied to the global competition goal, formulated within the so-called "Lisbon strategy" that seeks to make the Union "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" by 2010. From this optic, even anti-discrimination laws and policies, as envisioned by the EU Race Directive, do not so much aim at equality as allow a full utilization of society's resources in the global contest. As Eichenhofer (2005, 2) put it, "these people (women, handicapped, aged, and ethnic minorities) are to be fully included in society and labour market of the member states, not least in order to reduce the costs for social protection or welfare." Overall, social inclusion becomes narrowly tied to the labour market rather than the nation-state at large, motivated by the image of society "as a machinery of performance" (Haahr 2004, 225).

In its economic instrumentalism, integration as "social inclusion" is a world apart from old notions of cultural assimilation and nation building. However, there is still a "perfectionist" dimension to it, and one with paternalist, obligation imposing possibilities, in the sense that being at "work" is not just a means to obtain income, but is seen as of intrinsic importance to an individual's well-being. It must therefore be pursued, or imposed, for its own sake. The main purpose of social inclusion is social cohesion: that is, order, not justice. This distinguishes social inclusion, as a new form of repressive liberalism that frames contemporary globalization processes, from the old liberalism of equal opportunities, which had been the lode of the classic welfare state: "Whereas the aim of equality of opportunity seeks to put people in a position in

which they are able to participate in the economy and other aspects of social life, the aim of social inclusion also seems to include an element that sometimes requires people to become included. There are no rights without responsibilities" (Collins 2003, 24f). Social inclusion is *not* about equality: "Social inclusion does not seek the same…outcomes for citizens. It concentrates its attention…on the absolute disadvantage of particular groups in society" (*ibid*, 22). Social inclusion thus justifies group-specific policies of the State; it is indeed the prime justification of antidiscrimination policies that violate the equal treatment principle, such as positive action (or so is the interesting argument by Collins 2003). If, for instance, France is moving today toward Anglo-style, colour-conscious antidiscrimination policies, and thus to mellowing its traditional rejection of *communautarisme*, the reason is that, like all states in the European Union today, it is feeling the sway of the social inclusion and cohesion objectives.

However, one should not push the perspective of repressive liberalism too far, even where it seems to fit, the new policies of obligatory civic integration. There are also other, less discursive and more material-sociological factors driving these policies. For example, if one asks why civic integration in Canada, which has been practiced here under the blander name of settlement programs for more than half a century (Bloemraad 2006, ch. 3), has retained its entirely optional and voluntaristic face, while in Europe this policy is marked by a repressive tone, a plausible answer must also consider the vastly different demographic and sociological profiles of migrants to Canada and to Europe. Canada selects predominantly highly skilled and resourceful immigrants, which naturally helps in their adjustment. The majority of migrants to Europe, by contrast, are not "selected" at all, but enter on the basis of "rights" through the family reunification and asylum angles. Because the majority of these migrants is unskilled, non-proficient in the language of the receiving societies, and often directly dependent on welfare, they pose serious adjustment problems. The obligatory and repressive dimension of civic integration in Europe cannot be decoupled from the non-selected and essentially unwanted quality of most of her migrants.

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Notes

[1] See *Migration News Sheet*, February 2004, p. 25.

[2] *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 November 2004.

[3] Other "common basic principles" of integration policy not further discussed here are: education, "inter-cultural dialogue," political participation (especially at the local level), the "mainstreaming" of integration policies in other policy portfolios, and the development of better "indicators and evaluation mechanisms."