

## A Different European Union: Is Multiculturalism Still Alive?

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### **Abstract**

Discussions on the future of the European Union are booming over the question of whether European nations and states are still on the same course. Multiculturalism has for long been one of the corner stones of the European project but recently, there has been more and more doubt of its sustainability. This paper aims to show that multiculturalism is still alive but it needs thorough reconsiderations if it is to be retained. We argue that it is necessary to look more towards a more dynamic model, such as interculturalism or civic integration. Looking into the problem from three levels, we want to show the need for a theoretical and practical rethinking of European national and political relations. Firstly, from the micro level, public opinion polls will be examined to show how people feel about other nations and minorities. Secondly, from the macro level, legal and institutional changes concerning citizenship status and minority rights will be researched, to show the new ways of states' dealing with the inflow of migrants. Finally, what could be considered as a mid-level, we will look at the political landscape of the European Union, to explore which political parties and coalitions are in power and whether or not it makes a significant shift from the previous decade and the beginning of the twentieth century. The three stated levels of research will provide evidence on the question of the state of multiculturalism in Europe at the moment, which will be discussed from a theoretical overview. It is a matter of the utmost importance due to the recent inflow of migrants and their future status, which is a question on which there is still no agreement at the level of the EU.

**Keywords:** European Union, multiculturalism, public opinion, political parties, nationality, interculturalism.

## **Introduction**

Globalisation has changed our everyday routine and meet people of different backgrounds, coming from different social milieu with which we are unfamiliar. Europe is a continent that attracts many immigrants and it has been like this for a long time but ways of dealing with differences have changed. Previously highly favoured and well-supported, the multiculturalist approach has more recently been altered and we are with new challenges to integration. We are focused on the extent of the policy modification and the way it happened. We will show that multiculturalist policies have been surpassed and superposed by a more integrationist approach, referred to as civic integration or interculturalism.

We are looking at different layers of the ways in which society deals with immigrants and minorities. The focus is on Europe, more specifically the European Union. The three levels we are looking at are: first, public opinion on immigrants and discrimination, second, the policies countries adopt for dealing with immigrants, especially those seeking citizenship and third, the rise of rightist and populist political parties which signal a change in people's thinking. The paper is divided into five sections. The introduction is followed by the second part, discussion on why multiculturalism is important in Europe. The third section looks into the major theoretical overview of multiculturalism and interculturalism. The fourth part is the major section in which we develop our argument, looking at three levels of thinking and dealing with immigrants. We show here how public opinion has changed, and how governments react to the influx of immigrants, adopting new integration procedures, but also how citizens react, in creating nationalist and rightist political parties, showing a willingness in introducing institutional policy changes. We discuss our findings in the fifth part, which is followed by a conclusion.

### **Why Should We Speak of Multiculturalism in Europe?**

Discussing the European future is growing in terms of relevance as different outcomes are opening up and becoming a reality. From Brexit to the ever-rising strength of populist and rightist parties all around Europe, it is no wonder that from the lowest level of citizen up to the European elites, the future of the European Union is in focus. Understanding the current moment depends on explaining, cultural and national relations among citizens. It is on the micro level that this is often disregarded in this discussion, due to other issues such as the economy and political relationships, but we argue that this should not be the case. Furthermore, everyone is often reminded of this by sudden and unexpected outrages.

Multiculturalism has for a long time been one of the corner stones of the EU, as “[f]rom its inception, united Europe is a de facto multicultural due to the coexistence and representation of several cultures [and] is also being shaped by supranational institutions to give cultural, national and linguistic diversity legal status” (Kastoryano, 2009, ix). Values of tolerance and appreciation have been preserved and put into major official documents, as it is the case with the Lisbon Treaty. However, discussing open borders by leading European politicians has been followed by instances of the harsh answers on a number of occasions and it was non-Europeans that were at once found guilty. Dialogue on distinguishing European and non-European identities is looming, resulting in political movements that are gaining support and entering parliaments and governments, affecting the orthodoxy of European political and party systems. The point is raised whether we are confronting two kinds of Europeans or there are only Europeans, detracting the identity from all the others who are not. On the other hand, there is a question of the way political institutions responded to the new social circumstances, which separated not only individuals, but also groups and states.

### **An Overview of the Theoretical Concepts of Multiculturalism and Civic Integration**

The basic argument of the paper is not to show that multiculturalism and civic integration exclude one another. As Cantle states, the failure of multiculturalism means that policies have failed to respond to changing social composition (Cantle, 2012, p. 53), rather than the concept itself. It is of the greatest importance to stress this because we are looking into practice and policy effects, rather than the way policies were supposed to work out or the two concepts. Difficulties of integrating into a dominant culture were common for migrants and had negative effects on their life opportunities. Multiculturalism was more identity oriented and resulted in closing and segregation, which are not unsatisfactory per se (e.g. Finney & Simpson, 2009, in Cantle, 2012, p. 59). Therefore, interculturalism is more culturally oriented, moving away from dominant ethnic relations. It aims at creating social conditions where individuals cannot only preserve their ethnic identity but also have to learn dominant cultural patterns. It is the key difference substantially, but its practice is even further away from multiculturalism.

We do not discuss multiculturalism and interculturalism in detail, but only present the basic theoretical ideas. Multiculturalism can be broadly defined as a set of policies and measures that aim at the protection of identity and the granting of a special status to minorities (e.g. Heckmann, 1993; Kymilicka, 2012; Rosado, 1997). It means

providing minorities with social status and rights which will enable them to preserve their specificity and their way of life. European practice and official documents recognized this and minorities have had a special status which could be realised in significant areas of life: public 'recognition', education, social services, public materials, law, religious accommodation, food, broadcasting and media (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2009). Multiculturalism provided recognition but that was where it effectively ended. These policies were unable to incorporate citizens into social life and provide them equal opportunity. It meant that more had to be done than just watch how neighbourhoods are becoming closed and sealed, often according to national and status belonging.

Critics of multiculturalism looked for new answers, after a backlash against multiculturalism (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2009). The importance of multiculturalism must not be underestimated, nor its values, but it is its ability to cope with diversifying social practices that is becoming more problematic. European experience is even more relevant here because it is difficult to speak of multiculturalism as a unitary project, due to national differences but also due to different policies. Its major weakness is its static nature, meaning it does not support integration and dialogue between cultures (Giddens, 2014). Therefore, separation becomes its actual reality. Interculturalism or civic integration can be understood as a more active policy which enhances common interests and values. It supports the more direct involvement of all citizens, irrespective of their national and cultural origins (Giddens, 2014; Joppke, 2007).

On the other hand, it raises levels of the possibility of receiving citizenship, by setting minimum standards for obtaining it. Joppke (2007) emphasises how important it is to integrate immigrants into the mainstream of society, stating four principles: first, they should be employed; second, they should respect basic liberal-democratic values; third, they should know the language of the society they live in as well as its most important institutions; and fourth, there have to be anti-discrimination laws and policies. The Council of the European Union stated in 2004 that integration is a process that can last, it is encompassing and takes into account different levels of political institutions, from the local to the EU level, but having national institutions as the key ones (Council of the European Union, 2004).

The need of stronger cultural integration, but also economic and political integration, is essential so there is a greater possibility of decent life opportunities and less possibility of inheriting inequality due to social background. On the other hand, the blending of different people, with different origins and ways of life makes it easier to create a common identity, which can hardly be the case if all are separated according

to their previously defined lines. We are unable to set the exact period when the shift happened but broadly put and according to the reports we use here, it has happened since 2000. Some countries already had the established practice, while others adopted it later. More specifically, it could be set at 2004 as it is the year the EU adopted a common immigrants integration policy (Joppke, 2007).

### **Moving Away from Multiculturalism**

The current European practice is far from multiculturalism. Clarifying this, we state that it has vanished or has been abandoned altogether, but rather that it has supplemented by new policies. Banting and Kymlicka (2012) discuss the similar issue. We believe that it can be observed on three levels: first, on the micro level, we see that the thinking of people has changed and major worries and attitude changes can be observed in thinking about 'others'. Second, the introduction of new policies and tests for obtaining citizenship are being introduced across European Union countries, aiming at strengthening the process of providing immigrants with an opportunity for obtaining citizen status. Finally, the rise of nationalist, rightist and populist political parties can also be observed all around the EU member states. It is a signal that public opinion can be channelled through political movements and also, that there is a willingness to institutionalise anti-immigration thinking.

If we speak about public opinion polls, recent Eurobarometers show a dramatic increase in the perception of immigration as the public's major concern. We can see that immigration and terrorism are two major concerns for a great number of people, and that these numbers have been kept at steady levels and have not dropped significantly since 2014. If we look at 2013, immigration was an important issue for only around 10 per cent of people and in 2014 it rose to around 20 per cent (European Commission, 2013a; 2013b; 2014a; 2014b). In the spring of 2015 it rose to 38 per cent and in autumn to 58 per cent and it had already become the issue of the greatest relevance for Europeans (European Commission, 2015b; 2015c). In 2016, it was just a few percentage points below 50 per cent (European Commission, 2016a; 2016b). On the other hand, we can follow the same way of thinking on terrorism, which was not, generally speaking a relevant issue for Europeans until 2015, when its relevance gained attention and in 2016, it seen to be second most important issue, standing at 39 percentage points (Ibid.). Table 1 shows the rise to prominence of the two issues for the period mentioned. Data on the perception of terrorism are also presented, for two reasons. Firstly, because it is often related to immigrants and secondly, because its rise coincided with the issue of immigration and has been steady as well.

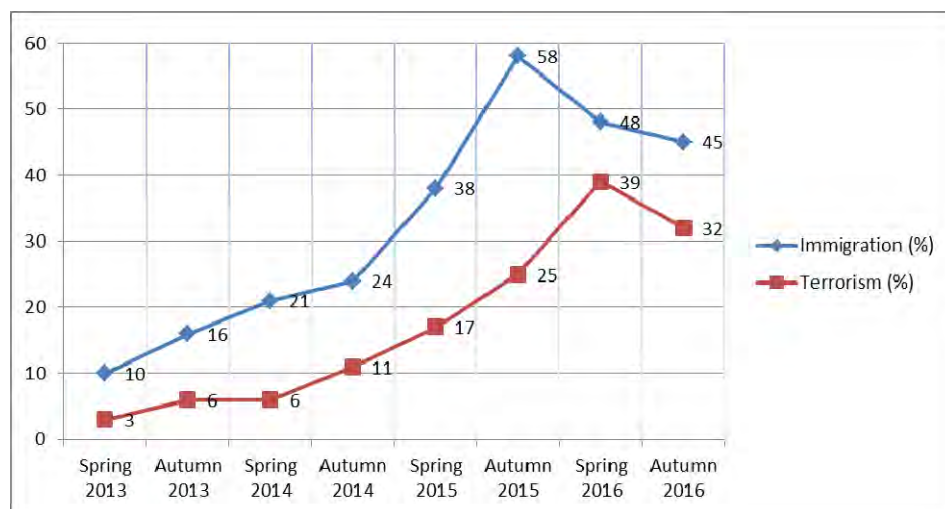


Table 1. Immigration and Terrorism perception levels 2013-2016 (Source: Eurobarometer).

In the same manner, data show that discrimination is on the rise and is the most widespread in the area of ethnic origins (European Commission, 2015a). The same document states it is followed by discrimination by sexual orientation, gender identity and religious belief. Also, it is of relevance to see that it is younger generations that state that discrimination by ethnic origins is the most widespread (Ibid.). Therefore, the public perception of difference has changed and this has coincided with the refugee crisis. The result is not only the higher attention given to the issue but also seeing it as the major issue for Europeans. If we have in mind that the European Union is seen as unity in diversity, this is an alert that more has to be done and the approach to practices thus far will have to be amended. Accordingly, multiculturalism as a way of perceiving others as equal is obviously at odds with reality and it must be redefined.

Looking at the level of the member states, we can observe redefining citizenship conditions. Policies differ, but as Vertovec and Wessendorf state, recently: “there is no doubt that the ‘integration’ of immigrants and ethnic minorities has become one of the foremost themes in national domestic policy throughout Europe and at the EU level itself” (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2009, p. 26). The same authors see this as a shift from supporting immigrants’ integration to the calling of immigrants to make their own efforts to integrate (Ibid.). Some states have introduced new procedures, of which we state some we see as the most relevant and worth showing. The German Immigration Act of 2004 has introduced an integrationist approach which can be

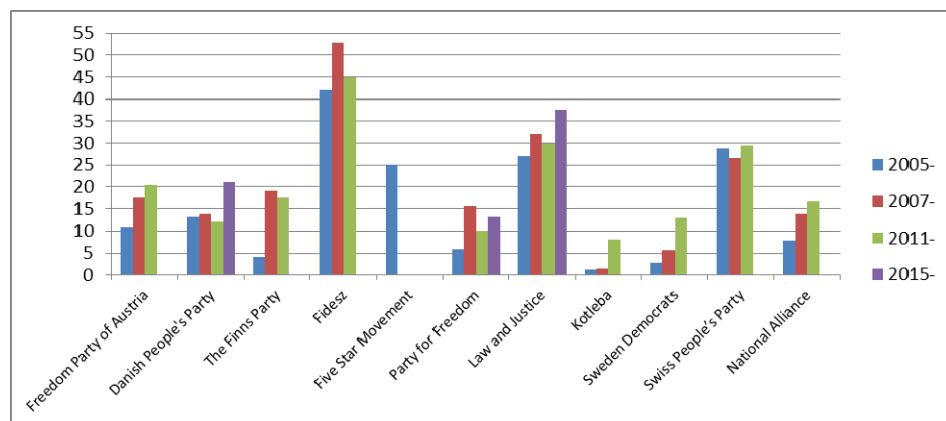
seen in the necessity of knowing the German language and culture, through attending language and history courses (Halibronner & Farahat, 2015). Newly naturalised Dutch citizens, as in the case of some other countries, have to swear or promise they will respect constitutional order with freedoms and rights (Böcker & van Oers, 2013). Before this, future citizens have to know the Dutch language but also do a test in which they prove they are aware of the social climate and way of thinking (Ibid.), and the same can also be said for Denmark (Ersbøll, 2013). Austria has citizenship tests that prove a candidates' knowledge of its history (Stern & Valchars, 2013). The United Kingdom has tests which check a candidate's knowledge of the social climate and way of thinking as well (Wray, 2013) and the number of similar measures has risen since the end of the nineties. Integration is a must for prospective citizens of Belgium (Wautelet, 2013). 'Previous knowledge' of the country became a norm (Carrera & Wiesbrock, 2009).

Also, many countries are not encouraging naturalisation and what can in some cases be an obstacle as well is the high price of citizenship tests that are obligatory. The French authorities check vast amounts of data on each applicant for citizenship, even his 'moral' record (Hajjat, 2013) and Sweden has a policy designed in a similar manner (Bernitz, 2013). These are cases of some of the countries, which show that citizenship status has changed and is far from recognition. Rather, it is much more demanding and puts greater responsibility on the citizens themselves. Multiculturalism is still anchored in their official documents but it is supported by much stronger and resolute requirements.

Official documents of these countries reveal a rising number of integration requirements of prospective citizens. However, it is the perception of the majoritarian population that is also discouraging for a multiculturalist approach. We observe this in the rise of the populist political parties and movements across Europe, which have been gaining significant support over the last decade or so. We cannot speak of all political movements that can be cast into this group but we mention only the ones whose popularity has arisen and whose political strength has been on the increase. All the results are taken from the database of Wolfram Nordsieck (Nordsieck, 2017).

The Freedom Party of Austria has been increasing its share of the votes, from 11 per cent in 2006 to 20.5 per cent in 2013. The Danish People's Party now has the support of 21.1 per cent of the population, increasing from 13.2 per cent in 2005. The Finns party had only 1.57 per cent of the vote in 2003 and in 2015 it was supported by 17.6 per cent of Finnish voters. The National Front in France is prevented from entering parliament by the electoral system but its leader is now one of the favourites to win the presidential elections this year, entering the second round ballot. The Five Star

movement in Italy is a new political group, currently supported by 23.8 per cent of Italian voters. The Dutch Party for Freedom won 13.1 per cent support in the most recent elections which is more than twice that of 2006. The very conservative Polish Law and Justice Party is one of the major parties, with a majority at the moment. The same is the case with the Swiss National Party which is the strongest political actor in the country. Sweden Democrats had been an insignificant political party before 2014, when they won 12.9 per cent of the vote, becoming the third largest party in Sweden. Slovakia and Latvia have also seen a rise in populist parties, having Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia winning 8.4 per cent in the 2016 elections and the National Alliance having 16.6 per cent support in 2014, respectively. The UK Independence Party has not gained significant support in numbers but can clearly be stated as one of the key actors in the Brexit debate. Table 2 shows levels of support for some of the mentioned parties. Each of the rows represents one election and due to different election times, we divided the time frame into four periods. The first elections in all countries were held before 2007, second before 2011 and third before 2015. Some countries had four elections (e.g. Denmark, Poland, the Netherlands) and the fourth electoral cycle was after 2015.



**Table 2.** Major rightist parties vote share, 2005-2016 (Source: Nordsieck, 2017).

We see here that all of these parties and movements have seen a significant and often very sharp rise in support and none had any major fallback. All of them are united by one distinctive characteristic: their right-wing ideology, which is anti-immigration oriented and nationalistic. They are seen as the counterpart of what the EU stands for and what multiculturalism as a concept pledges to support. They are united in being anti-multiculturalist and progressing on the idea of multiculturalism as a concept that



is reversing Europe and turning it into something different, many even looking at disintegration as a likely future. What also makes it different and specific is that these parties are gaining support in countries which are mostly the ones with the highest proportion of incoming immigrants (Eurostat, 2017).

## Discussion

We have seen that the image of a multiethnic and diversified Europe has changed, from the bottom up. Multiculturalism as the basic and only concept is no in jeopardy if we look at the three levels described in the previous section. Why is it so important and what do these three actually mean? First of all, we can see that reaction is coming from the 'majoritarian' part of the community. They perceive incoming immigrants as being different and what is even worse, as a threat. It is a reaction to the European Union's unpreparedness in the case of the most recent influx of immigrants and its inability to cope with the effects of these events. Alexander (2013) stresses that the EU has failed in creating civic solidarity, thereby resulting in what we see today and discuss in this paper, as the outcome. Uncoordinated and often changing politics of the EU member states contributed to these effects. Seeing minorities in this way from the beginning is a strong deviation from multiculturalist politics as it inhibits any recognition of equality at the very beginning.

Second, citizens' perception does not have to be considered as the problem per se. However, knowing that the highest growth in populist support has coincided with high immigration, it has to raise an awareness of the problem. It is the case because perception is treated as an obvious problem and citizens are in need of transferring it to representative institutions. This could be treated even as a rejection of multiculturalism as part of the population is looking for the discouragement of multiculturalist principles. The diversity of politics and party programs makes it hard to make a single conclusion, but it is certain that they are united in keeping the community less different in its social composition. On the other hand Rooduijn et al. (2014) argue that populism is not contagious and multiculturalism is not dead. It supports our thesis. The same authors also identify many more political parties that can be grouped in the same manner, which depends on the level of activity and party programs (Ibid.). Similar to the argument that we are making, just looking at the issue in more depth.

Third, at the official state level, countries are moving away from multiculturalism by adopting more integration-oriented policies which aim at creating capable citizens, ones that are socially well-equipped. Citizen integration aims at knowing the language, history, and the necessary social skills as well as an ability to adopt a new

identity. As has been stated above, it is not only their successful social integration that is at stake. The utmost aim is lowering the probability of social exclusion and enhancing the opportunity for employment, it being one of the key elements for economic sustainment. These are seen as the key requisites of independence and a decreased need for state dependence. It is not the case at the moment as immigrant status is one of the components contributing to the risk of poverty and social exclusion (Eurostat, 2017). In other words, countries do not support immigration but make acquiring citizenship status more difficult.

The role of the state has turned from that of protector into that of controller. It is a major turn, which signals towards shifting politics from recognition to integration. The inability of the European Union to make a common stance on the immigration crisis contributed to this in two ways. First, in countries which did not officially support the opening-up of borders, by strengthening and solidifying public opinion. Second, in creating a sense of the nonexistence of a common policy which is rooted in far-sighted aims and not in short term measures. Delanty (2013) argues that the national imagination of a migrant will determine developments on the European Union level. Due to all the differences and problems as already described, he proposes a cultural model of the nation, seeing it as being more open and inclusive (Ibid.). It is an argument that deserves support but due to all that we have stated above, it is the idea that can hardly be taken as a basis on which we should try to overcome all of the obstacles.

Combining all three ways of thinking and acting shows that the European continent is not becoming undemocratic but rather that democracy in Europe is shifting. Instead of providing rights we are dealing with providing duties and responsibilities, which are more individualized and not community oriented. The rights of groups are not detracted but are compiled in a way that they function only if each individual is able to fulfill his or her commitments to the state or local level. We could refer to it as a specific type of investment. It does not imply the rejection of multiculturalism but rather, that it must be supported by other means. Civic integration or interculturalism has been recognized as the official policy and public opinion in the European Union strongly supports this way of thinking. Populist parties are still not that strong to cause any political shock but they pose a large enough alarm to multiculturalism as a practice.

Having a more differentiated Europe is a everyday reality. Discussing the three important matters demonstrates the need of further and stronger coordination of the activities at the EU level. It is of the greatest importance for the European Union to show this, so that citizens can feel the systemic way policies are organized.

Recognition of the other as different and acknowledging their rights is not a sufficient policy any more. We can only observe shifting patterns but not see what the outcomes are.

## **Conclusion**

Everyday European life is being altered in two ways: it is becoming more diversified and ways of dealing with others are changing as well. The number of immigrants is rising but the level of their social acceptance does not follow suit. We have tried to show that the social climate has moved towards a more negative opinion of immigrants. What is even more striking, the official policy has changed as well. Furthermore, a certain proportion of the population wants to deal with immigrants in a more radical way by supporting radical and nationalist political parties.

Assessing the change on three levels of thinking and acting showed us that we are witnessing a move towards a more integrationist approach to the status of immigrants. Immigration is a major issue for Europeans and fears of terrorism and discrimination based on national and ethnic origin are seen as the most widespread example. States have adopted a more integrationist approach towards citizenship, clearly looking at prospective citizens as persons who are more familiar with the social climate and integrated, rather than just recognized as members of a minority group. Rightist political parties are still not ruling in the numbers that we could admit to as being threatening. Their presence is looming in two ways: they are becoming more numerous and their share of the vote is increasing.

All of this supports the fact that multiculturalism is not dead in Europe but rather that it is being altered and upgraded by more civic integration or interculturalist policies. The relationship between the immigrant and the state has changed in a way that responsibility is now placed more on the individual with the state being seen as an evaluator of how integrated a person is. Consequently, it is a relocation from a multiculturalist approach. Increasing support for this kind of approach is seen as being a very strong signal of changing patterns, but we are still unable to see a systemic approach from the European Union and if there was one, the concept of citizenship might respond in a different manner. At the moment, nationalism is on the increase and it is the one thing that is closed and unwilling to open out to any acceptance of difference. The forthcoming period will answer the question if this frame of mind continues to gain support or it will be put on hold.

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