

THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES BETWEEN UTOPIA AND POLITICAL SUICIDE

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Abstract : *This paper underlines the challenge of social integration of immigrants in European countries considering the bloody terrorist attacks which took place in recent past. Current waves of immigrants who have entered Europe provided a controversial perspective on socio-demographic characteristics of immigrant populations. As a result, the new European immigration reforms are required to achieve certain important features regarding integration and social cohesion. It is also very important to highlight the link between immigration policies and radical Islamic terrorism. The social integration of immigrants in European host countries seems not a very realistic prospect given the many cultural, religious and welfare differences. Moreover, the recent influx of Muslim immigrants continue to become more like a reversed memory of glorious white European settlers who colonized the uncivilized nations. The statistical analysis provided by this research article reinforces the concern regarding social integration of immigrants in European countries.*

Keywords: *immigrants, social integration, Islamic terrorists, European countries, statistical analysis, immigration reforms*

JEL Classification : F0, J0, H0

1. Introduction

This research paper investigates the challenge of social integration of immigrants in European countries given the multitude of negative events in the recent past. Regarding the possibility of social integration, the individual characteristics of immigrants are extremely important in this process. Furthermore, immigrants with better chances of integration are individualized by specific traits such as : knowledge of foreign languages, work-related skills, professional training, moral values, age, race, respect for law, obedience to national authorities and EU institutions. According to Eurostat - Migration and migrant population statistics, citizens of non-member countries are better selected in relation to factors such as language proficiency, work experience, education and age. Obviously, the attitude towards the idea of immigrants of the host communities is critical to social integration. From the beginning, combating discrimination and racism are some important EU policy goals. However, it is important to understand the concept of immigrant based on the differences between citizens of non-member countries and people with citizenship of a different EU Member State from the one to which they immigrated. Naturally, myths spreads on immigration and the effects are often deliberately amplified in one direction or another, especially for further consideration. Illegal immigration represents one of the most debated issues and there are many controversies regarding its negative implications for EU Member States. In addition, certain terrorist attacks are closely linked to the recent waves of immigrants in EU-28 mainly due to increased possibility to infiltrate amongst the very immigrants who seek asylum. In other words, there were cases in which radical Islamic terrorists were unfortunately believed to be Syrian refugees seeking asylum in European Union Member States.

2. Literature review

The aim of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive framework on the issue of social integration of immigrants in European countries considering that it is a subject of great current interest. A rather high concern about the diversity of multicultural

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perspectives provides the opportunity to identify a realistic assessment of the social integration of immigrants in European countries. The academic research are not similar and reach very complex approaches based on useful conclusions.

Marino, Penninx and Roosblad (2015) argued that immigrants are often considered “as outsiders who take jobs, sponge welfare benefits, and threaten social cohesion”. Moreover, Markaki and Longhi (2013) suggested that “regions with a higher percentage of immigrants born outside the EU and a higher unemployment rate among the immigrant population show a higher probability that natives express negative attitudes to immigration”. However, UNICEF revealed a very delicate ie “children and women, especially those migrating without documentation, are vulnerable to trafficking, abuse and exploitation”.

Boer (2008) investigated the issue of immigration and its effect on the security discourse in Europe and emphasized the importance of “a regulatory balance between the creation of a common asylum and immigration policy and the repression of illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings”. Giulietti, Guzi, Kahanec and Zimmermann (2013) investigated certain sensitive issues such as unemployment benefits and immigration based on an evidence from the EU.

Toshkov and Kortenska (2015) suggested that “immigration seems to undermine integration, although internal migration within the EU is necessary for the successful functioning of its economic union and the future of political integration” based on a case study targeting Spain, France, Ireland and the Netherlands. Mood, Jonsson and Brodin (2016) investigated immigrant integration and youth mental health in four European countries, ie England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Ceobanu (2011) investigated immigrants’ impact on crime in European countries and concluded on the basis of his analysis that it is influenced by certain factors such as “having friends among immigrants, residing in an ethnic neighborhood, having affinity with right-wing ideologies or several socio-demographic characteristics”.

3. Empirical analysis and dissemination of results

The World Bank suggested that more than 247 million people were living outside of their countries of birth in 2013, and over 750 million migrate within their countries. According to Eurostat - Migration and migrant population statistics, a total of 3.8 million people immigrated to one of the EU-28 during 2014, but partitioned by member states, Germany reported the largest total number of immigrants (884.9 thousand), followed by the United Kingdom (632.0 thousand), France (339.9 thousand), Spain (305.5 thousand) and Italy (277.6 thousand). Moreover, in 2014, there were an estimated 1.9 million immigrants to the EU-28 Member States from non-member countries.

In 2015, the number of first time asylum applicants from Syria increased to 363 thousand in the EU-28, ie 29 % of the total, Afghans have achieved a rate of 14 % of the total, individuals from Iraq accounted for 10 %, Kosovans and Albanians for 5 % and Pakistanis for 4 % based on Eurostat - Asylum statistics. Moreover, according to Eurostat - Asylum statistics, the number of first time asylum applicants in Germany increased from 173 thousand in 2014 to 442 thousand in 2015 while Hungary, Sweden and Austria also reported very large increases, ie that in all these cases it exceeds the increase with over 50 thousand more first time asylum applicants between 2014 and 2015.

It is very difficult to determine with high accuracy how many immigrants came to Europe because of the war and how many because of attractive opportunities provided by developed Member States. It is also very difficult to establish how many potential terrorists have entered Europe under the pretext of avoiding the front war and repression. Unfortunately, recent terrorist attacks in countries such as France or Belgium revealed significant vulnerabilities in security systems.

4. Conclusions

The integration policies of the European states attaches great importance to social integration of immigrants. The link between immigration policies and radical Islamic terrorism should not be ignored and provides a complex insight especially in terms of globalization. European countries are witnessing a great challenge of the modern age. Maybe some apocalyptic opinions highlight only the negative aspects of the immigration phenomenon, but the general tendencies are strongly influenced by the fear of terrorist attacks. A high concern about illegal immigration also generates concern about social integration of immigrants in European countries. It may seem an utopia for politicians to support in a significant manner the social integration of immigrants in European countries especially under the auspices of the bloody terrorist attacks which took place in recent past. The political cost of a hasty initiative is significant given the importance of the immigration issue in European countries. Otherwise the attitude of member countries has been far from uniform, but highly polarized (for example Hungary vs Germany).

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