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**Article**

## Melting the Pot?

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## Panel 3

## Introduction

## MELTING THE POT?

ARMIN NASSEHI\*

Immigration is one of the most widely discussed issues in public debates across Europe. An observer wishing to paint a picture of European, or even of German views, would conclude that immigration and the integration status and problems of immigrants are a crucial nexus of social order and problems. All over Europe, migration policies and especially the huge influx of refugees in 2015, have become a highly controversial issue. Migration issues have also given a huge boost to right wing parties in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Austria, Greece and Germany. The dividing line between political camps in Europe can be defined by their attitude towards migration. It is possible that political programs and attitudes are no longer defined by the differences between middle-class and lower-class orientations, or between liberal and socialist leanings. The politically relevant division now seems to be whether individuals favour an inclusive or exclusionary approach to immigrants.

This is an almost paradoxical situation, as we know that the German welfare system, for example, depends on a high number of immigrants into the labour market over the decades ahead. According to research by the Bertelsmann-Foundation, Germany needs a steady influx of 300,000 to 500,000 immigrants per year from non-EU-countries in the short term. It is indisputable that the refugee immigration seen in recent years will not address these economic problems. It is also undisputable, however, that European countries, and especially Germany, have to develop an effective immigration policy due to their demographic structure. This is undoubtedly a paradoxical situation: the

future of Europe depends on immigration in the near future, and yet immigration is one of the most hotly contested issues in political debate, with far-reaching consequences for national politics and political party systems. The resurrection of nationalistic tendencies – both on the right and left wing – is an outcome of this paradoxical situation.

In my view, migration issues are merely acting as catalysts for pre-existing social conflicts and insecurities in European societies. Immigration was a powerful symbol in the Brexit-campaign in Britain – a symbol for a *rendezvous* with globalisation that triggered uncompromising forms of political protest and resistance. In all European countries, the success of right-wing parties and right-wing campaigns are related to migration topics, but what they fundamentally represent is a more basic criticism of modernisation processes.

This is in no way a bid to play down the problems related to migration in Germany or underestimate the challenge posed by huge influxes of refugees for Germany and Europe. However, I am convinced that the overestimation of migration problems is underpinned by basic social problems and general perceptions that today's world is a stressful place.

My argument is structured into five tiers.

Firstly, before thinking about appropriate integration concepts and tools, it is necessary to recognise the environment in which discussions over migration and integration are currently taking place. Migration problems are like a gift for simplifiers. We live in a world in which the shape of society and the origins of social problems have become confusing, and to some extent inexplicable. That is why right-wing demagogues are used to hating the European Union more than immigrants and foreigners. The European Union, as well as the financial crisis and expectations/fears of social inequality, seem to be topics that can only be explained by experts and scholars. The complexity of modern society, the interconnectedness of social structures, and the high level of uncertainty in decision-making both in political and economic affairs has become a widely shared experience not only in the lower classes



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of society, but also amongst the middle classes and the educated parts of society.

Of course, we live in a world in which simple causalities no longer apply. In the wake of the Brexit-referendum, for example, many people are beginning to learn just how complex the structures of the political, economic, scientific, cultural and legal dependencies among European countries have become. So many reasons for the campaign against the EU have now been unmasked as dramatic simplifications – but also as realistic experiences in a complex society, which has failed to develop narrations for this new and complex situation. The narrations that were available for the different milieus and social groups in society, symbolised both in political party programs and expectable life-forms in different milieus, are no longer applicable. As we know from psychological research, the experience of insecurity and fear increases at times when there are no available explanations for ongoing events. During the classical era of industrial modernity the nation-state was not only a form of identification that transcended social milieus, social strata and different life-forms. The nation-state was also a limiting factor for the observation of the world. The limited perspective of the nation-state provided a sense of order during modernization processes in terms of economic and technical development, the accelerating speed of social processes, the pluralization of life-forms in a consumer society, etc.

Although migration can be regarded as a matter of fact for all human societies in history, modern societies have nevertheless developed a special form of homogeneity in terms of ethnic or national identification. In times of rising migration flows and growing social plurality and complexity, the need for greater transparency and clarity also increases as a result. As noted above, migration issues tend to catalyse conflicts in modern societies. The reason why migration issues have become the allegedly most important problem of many countries in Europe can be seen as a reaction to the problem of complexity.

Since the demise of the autonomous and self-sufficient nation-state, the highly complex nature of modern societies has become increasingly visible and is perceived as threatening to swathes of people across all classes of modern societies.

A complex system like a modern society is defined by what I will refer to here as a problem of understanding

and description. Strictly speaking, complex societies can only be understood by digital means and *via* complex explanations. Reduced to a formula, explanations are only possible with statistical groups not with social groups; and in that sense must rely on digitalised information, whereas people are in search of analogue information. The need for visible information to understand societal structures and developments is counteracted by the stunning insight that the complex interaction between different factors of societal relevance is becoming increasingly invisible. As a result, modern society can only be understood by digital means, but lives have to be conducted analogously. Immigrants, and particularly refugees, can be perceived as analogue, visible and really existing social groups. They symbolise a special kind of high-profile visibility in an increasingly intangible and complex world.

This is important to bear in mind for members of the educated higher, middle classes and members of decision-making elites seeking to understand why migration has become the most visible symbol of an, in principle, invisible, confusing, and barely understandable world. This in no way exculpates right-wing policies or prejudices against immigrants; but research shows that there is a high correlation between xenophobia and the experience of confusion, if only a media-produced confusion, led by the idea that a bad story is a good story. The middle class standards of universalistic arguments are often far removed from the experiences of groups of society living in a world that seems increasingly unstable.

Confidence in society's basic institutions such as the state, political parties, the media, the education system, and even in the church, has waned dramatically. In addition, confidence in individual economic success as a driver of social advancement has also been eroded. Recent surveys prove that the Germans in particular are quite anxious about the future. This may sound strange in view of Germany's economic success and the high standards of its welfare state. But these are the attitudes overshadowing the public debate on asylum and immigration problems in Germany. Whether refugees really are rivals and competitors remains to be seen – but they are becoming recognised as competitors and symbols of a change in society and culture. Angst and concern are the most plausible semantics of the public debate in Germany.

Germany today is undoubtedly an immigration country: 20 percent of the population has a migrant back-

ground. But Germany did not really accept its identity as an immigration country until very recently. The integration situation in Germany is far better than its reputation. Problems nevertheless persist: a migration background still entails the risk of poorer performance in education, the job market and the housing market. Beyond this, migrant milieus are also heavily segregated in many German cities. German society has tolerated such segregation, because there was no real awareness that Germany is undoubtedly an immigration country that needs to cope with the long-term presence of people with a migration background. Germany's first step towards accepting its role as an immigration country was the reform of its citizenship law in 2000. This marked the first move towards a normalization of immigration to Germany.

Different areas of conflict exist as far as migration issues are concerned:

- The most decisive point to be mentioned is that public awareness of migration and migrants is characterised by negative diagnoses, problems and conflicts. This is a highly paradoxical finding, because what we call successful integration is synonymous with a special kind of invisibility. Well-integrated migrants are characterised by the fact that their status as migrants does not determine all other information concerning their lives. Good integration means becoming more alike the autochthonous population. So the debates on migration issues often have a negative bias. The following areas of conflict are not representative of the migration situation in Germany, but still need to be discussed.
- There are highly integrated migration communities in several German cities. The term 'highly integrated' means that membership of these communities superposes all other activities. One of the results is that members of such groups have only a low likelihood of leaving these closed communities and of climbing the social ladders successfully. One of the most important challenges in terms of the refugee crisis is to avoid such parallel-structures.
- One highly disputed issue is the level of crime among migrants. The level of crime among the immigrant population in Germany is about 24 percent higher than the average rate. But if the social status of the foreign population gets rated out, there is no difference between the autochthonous and the allochthonous population in Germany. This is another finding which proves that the inte-

gration status of migrants in Germany is better than its reputation.

- The most frequently discussed issue is religion. As we know from survey data, the attitudes towards migrants in Germany highly correlate with religion. In simpler terms, a general rejection of migrants does not exist in Germany, but a high level of rejection of Muslims. Islamic self-identification has undoubtedly become a source of identity politics for migrants from Islamic countries in all European countries. Strikingly Islamic identification was neither a conflict point nor a special resource for the first generation of migrants. But since a politicized Islam has become one of the conflicting ideologies from a global perspective, this identity feature has emerged as a resource for both self-identification and for coping with the experience of precariousness.

These fields of conflict are the main obstacles to a rational and unemotional public debate on migration issues. What we know from research is that these fields of conflict interfere with general atmospheres of fear and social inequality. The refugee crisis has triggered a general mood of discomfort over the future of migration policies in Western countries. In the special case of Germany, it seems to be a somehow invisible matter of course that an active policy of immigration is overdue. Germany is probably now paying the price for its inactive migration politics in recent decades.

Compared to classical immigration countries, Germany has never pursued an active immigration policy – apart from its recruitment of workers from southern-European countries and Turkey prior to 1973. But this recruitment was not meant as an immigration policy, but more as a sporadic solution for problems in the labour market. The most decisive difference between Germany and classical immigration countries is that the latter countries use immigration to solve their own problems. There is a difference between an active and a passive form of managing this issue. Classical immigration countries produce a special kind of inclusive dynamism, which is often combined with more liberal and competitive ideas of society than welfare-oriented or social-democratic ideologies. This seems to be a contradiction, but the integration of immigrants in a country like Germany with an active and inclusive policy based on the concept of an active and regulating state differs from states with a more individualistic idea of personal success. The bureaucratic obstacles to integrating refugees into the labour mar-

ket can be interpreted as a symbol of a lack of flexibility in coping with unexpected situations.

Recent experiences with the refugee crisis may offer an opportunity to learn more about what integration means. Public debates tend to make integration sound like an issue of compliance with the host country's legal order or constitution, and a willingness to comply with its culture or not. Such compliance is not, however, the starting point of the integration process but – in the best scenario – its outcome. What immigrants need are what I would like to call docking points to social institutions. Modern ways of life are not organised centrally. Members of modern societies, both allochthonous and autochthonous, are not the inhabitants of containers and closed groups, but are selectively connected to different institutions and instances of society. Modern lives have to be conducted individually. Integration into society means finding an arrangement to manage these different connecting points and avoiding being a member of highly-integrated social groups that cannot be transcended.

An active migration and refugee policy has to be aware of such structures and has to take into account that a catalogue of measures should begin with the idea of providing chances of connecting with labour markets, housing markets, and other institutions of society. Religious beliefs emerge afterwards, when the connection to these institutions has produced life-forms, in which the status of immigrant is not the only information about a person.

In that sense, Germany has to develop a more active immigration and integration policy. The public discourse about immigration and integration in Germany too often discusses abstract, academic problems of cultural differences, of the compatibility of ways of life and of religious ideologies. As mentioned above, conflicts with cultural or ethnic roots are not the starting point of integration problems, but their outcome. Many cultural problems will therefore become less likely to occur when immigrants have a chance to participate in the practical areas of everyday life. Key factors in successfully forging immigrant integration are language, education, employment, avoiding segregation and a sense of belonging to the country.

A large share of the recent influx of refugees cannot start work immediately, but should, in my view, be integrated into the labour market as soon as possible. It

will take a long time for refugees to become net contributors. This economic perspective is probably an overly pessimistic view, because it does not take the secondary effects of such employment into account. Even if this pessimistic view may be true in economic terms, however, working is necessary to promote the integration of immigrants and refugees. Measures such as the liberalisation of labour markets, qualification programs, or second labour market programmes need to be implemented to accelerate this integration process. In realistic terms, this kind of immigration requires an active and supporting policy – both on behalf of the refugees and the autochthonous population that also stands to benefit from such programmes. This could take the form of an investment programme – both an economic investment, but also an investment in integration success.

To conclude, the immigration situation in Germany is characterised by two paradoxes: firstly, although there has been a negative backlash due to the high influx of immigrants, Germany actually needs an even greater number to address its demographic problems. What Germany needs, however, is immigration into the labour market, and that means introducing an immigration law with a discussion over active immigration policies. The best case scenario would be to combine this active immigration policy with humanitarian elements.

The second paradox is that although we all want well-integrated immigrants who have the opportunity of social advancement, this will produce another kind of conflict, as these well-integrated people will make demands on society. Germany has little experience of such demands and conflicts to date, so we have to prepare our public and our institutions to handle these new forms of diversity. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from traditional immigration countries in this context.

## PANEL

This panel, chaired by **Quentin Peel**, Contributing Editor of the *Financial Times*, focused on the instruments and institutional measures needed for the successful integration of migrants, especially at the micro level.

The Introduction was provided by Armin Nassehi, Professor of Sociology at the University of Munich. Mr Peel then asked **Cardinal Reinhard Marx** how he

sees the challenges facing Germany in successfully integrating the new immigrants. Cardinal Marx reported that despite all the problems, in his parishes there is an unabated willingness to help. His diocese spans over twenty different ethnic congregations and includes a large number of immigrant parishioners who are very well integrated. Faced with the present challenge, the Church is taking an active role, although there is now a greater need for professional input, rather than voluntary work. The Church is willing to do its part, but a major question is what the future vision of our society will be?

Cardinal Marx highlighted the current movement towards national interests, identities and security. “As a church we are the true internationalists and universalists”, noted Cardinal Marx. He rejected the current, backward-looking trend towards nationalism as a vision for the future. Quentin Peel observed that the current public narrative on immigration is negative, and focused entirely on how it can be controlled and limited. This narrative can be changed, according to Cardinal Marx, by defining a vision of society in Europe. In the future most of us will live in multi-cultural situations and will have to learn to respect each other without sacrificing our principles. “The desire to return to a homogeneous society is a regressive narrative when what we need is a forward-looking narrative”, he explained.

**Aida Hadzialic**, Minister for Education and Research in Sweden, highlighted the macroeconomic indicators that have helped Sweden to deal with the migration challenge. In the early 1990s, when her parents brought her to Sweden from war-torn Yugoslavia, Sweden was in a far poorer economic situation than it is today, but still took in many migrants and managed to integrate them fairly successfully. The employment rate of her group of immigrants is now in parity with that of the native Swedish population. Her circumstances are similar to the situation today in some ways, although the cultural differences between today’s migrants and the native population are greater and present problems. Nationalism, as witnessed in the break-up of Yugoslavia, is definitely not the answer. “We do, however, need to talk about the national identity of our countries and the European continent”, warned Ms Hadzialic. Our cultures, values and traditions are important – if this is seen as relative, the populist parties stand to gain ground. “We need to create a common ground rooted in our basic Western liberal values”, she added.

**Ulrich Hörning**, Deputy Mayor of Leipzig, agreed that: “we must not leave the identity debate to the false simplifiers of nationalism, but need to consciously promote an identity of democracy, liberalism and Western values”. Although Leipzig is enjoying growing economic success, it remains a poor city, and the new migrants are moving into neighbourhoods where people often feel marginalised. “We are now dealing with a humanitarian assistance situation, but are also working within the confines of the German regulatory state, with data protection, fire protection, monument protection, and few of these regulations have been relaxed”, explained Mr Hörning. He hopes that this proves to be a shock that will lead to a modernisation of the administration in Germany to prevent benefit misuse and non-integration, and with less of an emphasis on benefits and more on social services.

Quentin Peel referred to the demographic of people that feel left behind – the identity question seems to be a cover for the fact that they have lost out economically. Armin Nassehi observed that this question is often an ‘empty signifier’ that arises out of an economic crisis or uncertainty over whether society works. It is also present in the middle class among those who fear decline. Modernity itself is stressful and a challenge for both immigrants and society as a whole. According to Peel, “we need a narrative to talk about something that can be transformed into policy, political programmes and public communication. Integration into labour markets is the starting point for integration into society. This worked for the first two guest-worker generations in Germany even without an immigration policy; now it is the identity problem that needs to be solved”.

Cardinal Marx added two comments. With regard to ‘identity’, he emphasised that agreement on a ‘civil religion’ is precisely “what we do not want”. Integration means adhering to basic values, as well as providing room for a diversity that can be quite broad-ranging. Secondly, we need a new development aid policy to improve conditions in the sending countries, but also to train migrants here, with a view to them potentially returning to their home countries in the future. “We should see migration in global terms and not simply in terms of our own national interests”, said the Cardinal.

Aida Hadzialic pointed out that the nationalist party in Sweden has recently won over a lot of voters from the conservative party, i.e. from the more prosperous



citizens who feared that the changes were happening too rapidly. Norway also has a growing populist party, primarily due to issues of culture and identity. “We must stick to our values of democracy and equality and we must insist that there are rights and obligations for everyone, and that we all have a common obligation to continue to develop our societies”.

Ulrich Hörning observed that the more heterogeneous a society is, the less support there is for redistribution. For a political consensus on redistribution to exist, there must be “a unity of the national state, identity, territory, taxation and public-goods provision”. A problem arises, for example, when the German state offers full social benefits to other EU nationals. “We must try to achieve differentiation at the national and EU level, for if the social consensus on the financing breaks down, we are in a dire situation”, warned Mr Hörnung.

**John Kornblum** suggested avoiding using the word ‘migrant’, as it has negative connotations. In his view, dropping the term would contribute to the integration of immigrants. Armin Nassehi agreed, arguing that migration is only one particle of identity, and that societies without migrants also have integration problems.

Cardinal Marx stressed that for Christians all human beings are created by God and are therefore all children of God. For this reason it is impossible to send anyone back to a war zone or to face persecution.

**Osama Abdelmoghni** (Les Comptoirs, Paris) wanted to know how integration will work if it means giving up your cultural identity parameters. Aida Hadzialic responded that by saying believing in Western liberal democracy does not involve asking anyone to give up their own cultural traits. “We’re also not asking the native population to give up their cultural identity, and this is a problem that those in authority must address”, she added. In Ms Hadzialic’s opinion, new arrivals in a country need to be granted the same rights and opportunities as its native population. This was what enabled her to climb the ladder from being a child war-refugee to becoming a government minister in Sweden.

Quentin Peel then asked whether public authorities across Europe are trying to limit the number of immigrants by making life as uncomfortable as possible for them in order to discourage more from coming.

Ulrich Hörning expressed the hope that this is not the case in Germany, but noted that such policy decisions tend to be taken at a federal level, and not by local government.