Politics of Identity

IN FOCUS

What Next after Multiculturalism

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Summary

The failure of multiculturalism has been declared by many. Yet few have come up with alternatives to how Europe's ethnic and religious groups can co-exist in our liberal democracies. This InFocus argues that Europe can benefit from the genuine desire that many immigrants have, to identify with the constitutions of their new home countries while maintaining elements of their own culture. European and national policymakers should elaborate on the existing concept of interculturalism, and they could learn from the US and Canadian approaches to integration. Europe's centre-right political parties have a particular role not only in opening politics to immigrants and their descendants but also in forging strong national and European allegiances that are compatible with group belonging.

Introduction

The jihadist terror attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in early 2015 starkly reminded us that not all is well with the integration of Muslims into European societies. Paradoxically, the public demonstrations in France that followed the attacks injected a degree of optimism into European public life. These moving and encouraging public displays demonstrated beyond doubt that France continues to be a country of liberty. The 3.7 million people who were on the streets also proved, in their support for tolerance and freedom of speech, that liberal democracy is not dead.

Nevertheless, if anyone still had doubts, European liberal democracy is facing a number of external and internal tests. Among them are dealing with group identities and with jihadist terrorism, as these identities' extreme manifestation. Positively dealing with group belonging is a precondition to tackling the wider challenge, to create a sense of common purpose at the difficult times that Europe is experiencing.

The origins of jihadism

Jihadism has been successful in recruiting youngsters from across the Muslim world and Europe. Islam as such seems to have a problem in adapting to modernity. It renders itself to violent fanaticism more than any other religion (things were different some centuries ago, when even Christianity was much more prone to violent solutions than it is today). Ever since the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in order to recreate the Global Caliphate, jihadist violence against the West as well as against the apostates has had a thorough theological basis.

Scholars such as Francis Fukuyama and Olivier Roy have argued that radical Islamism does not come out of traditional Muslim societies and that in fact, it would be completely foreign to them. In a traditional Muslim (or Christian) society, an individual's identity not a matter of personal choice but this identity is completely determined by the family and community into which one is born. However, a confrontation with modern life and more importantly exposure to Al-Qaeda or ISIS, as well as living in despotic states and economic stagnation in the Middle East has radicalised sections of young populations.

Among young Muslims in Europe, things are only slightly different. When traditional Muslim families emigrate to Europe, they are no longer anchored to their old community. Second and third generation young Muslims then get a choice between two cultures that they cannot identify with: the traditional culture of their parents and the Western secular culture. Some young Muslims end up adopting the universalist ideology of violent jihadism. Hundreds of European converts to jihadism decide to follow the same aberrant ideal.

Closer comparison reveals surprising parallels with half-forgotten European history. The virulent anti-Semitism of the jihadists bears resemblance to that of Nazis and of the wider European milieu of the 1930s and earlier periods. More generally, the utopian nature and ruthless determination of the jihadists take inspiration not only from a particular reading of the Quran but also from National Socialism and communism. Both the secularist and nationalist ideology of Ba'athism, dominant in the Arab World during most of the twentieth century, and the mother of all Islamist movements, the Muslim Brotherhood, held national socialism and, more broadly, European fascism in high esteem. All these ideologies have one thing in common: they exaggerate the collective, and suppress the individual.

Coming to terms with Europe as an immigration continent

Whilst European totalitarianism may have partly inspired jihadism as an ideology, it is likely that mistakes in the integration of foreigners have something to do with the radicalisation of young Muslims in recent years. The topic requires further research and debate. It is obvious that today's European societies are not generating sufficient allegiance of their members and that our approaches to integration need to change.

The old adage that Europe is not an immigration continent rings hollow: just recall the religious and ethnic diversity that has existed in Europe since it has called itself a continent. Or look around in any major European city. As the academic Robert Putnam states, the increasing diversity of modern societies is among the most certain predictions that we can make.

We could put it even more bluntly: Europe is becoming more diverse, whether it likes it or not. Yet, the European discussion on immigrant integration is moving in circles, either blaming the indigenous majorities or the newcomers for the problems that continue arising.

Where do we go from here? 'Closing the borders' as some right-wing

populists would have it, is a nonsense that ignores the fact that millions of people of European citizens of Muslim or other non-Christian heritage live and work peacefully on the continent. Many have had to work double hard to 'make it', the usual fate of any immigrant.

None of this negates the need to better guard the external border of the Schengen Area and to improve the asylum system, so that Europe starts receiving legal, rather than illegal immigration.

Limiting the freedom of speech is not an option as it would lead to the destruction of our liberties. Incitement to violence should be punished but curbing even extreme criticism of domestic and foreign policies of European governments would be a mistake (and so would pointing out problems within immigrant communities).

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The traditional ideologies of the right and left can no longer be the solution. The left's idealisation of diversity as a goal in itself, or as something that per se strengthens our polity, has run into a dead end: the deficits in the socio-economic profile of immigrants and lower educational outcomes are just some symptoms of this approach not working. The right's purely security-minded approach to immigration has tended to marginalise newcomers. Strangely, these traditional approaches have one thing in common, a degree of indifference to whether immigrants and their offspring succeed in society and whether they truly integrate.

What is required is a new concept of co-existence, through which European societies become more open and allow those of immigrant origin prosper as individuals. Today's Europe needs to modernise its civic and political institutions so that include, and not tacitly exclude, those who were born, or whose parents were born, outside Europe.

The different traditions of corporatism and multiculturalism

Current European approaches of explicitly or implicitly recognising people primarily as members of groups, stems from European history. Different political and intellectual traditions have formed our understanding of groups.

In the nineteenth century, corporatism developed to provide legitimacy to professional and social groups, including trade unions, in society. The term was codified after Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum in 1891.

At least partly inspired by the theological concept of corporatism, some countries developed political consociationalist arrangements to accommodate conflicting claims of Catholics, Protestants, Jews and socialists. Power-sharing arrangements were devised to avoid violence between groups, and ensure government stability and parliamentary democracy. In addition to a pillar-based political party system, societal institutions such as religious schools and denominational trade unions, insurance companies and gymnastic societies facilitated civic life. The Netherlands between 1857 and 1967 is often cited as an example of successful consociationalism. In Belgium in the twentieth century, the institutional and societal pillarisation of society has allowed keeping the country intact, despite chronic institutional problems.

In inter-war Czechoslovakia, pillarisation by ethnic group and class co-existed with a liberal democratic regime. However, the ethnic Czech pillar was far too dominant. Conversely, German, Slovak, Magyar and other speakers were sidelined so that when massive external pressure came in 1938-39, their loyalty to the Czechoslovak state proved weak. Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Dayton Agreement of 1995 is an extreme example of a consociationalist structure in which loyalty to the common state is subservient to communal ethnic ties, thus disabling the central state.

What corporatism and consociationalism have in common – when properly implemented – is the emphasis on the corpus, the common body to which the limbs, or different groups, belong. Unity is attained through a particular arrangement of the constituent parts, which are mutually dependent. The 'corpus' in corporatism refers to an overarching cultural identity.

The rather different tradition of multiculturalism developed later than corporatism and consociationalism. Multiculturalism has never been precisely defined but can be broadly understood as ethnic and religious groups, living side by side without much mutual interaction. The emphasis is on autonomous ethnic groups, existing according to their cultural traditions.

Rather than being a conscious societal strategy for integrating immigrants, in countries such as Germany multiculturalism emerged because of a lack of government intervention, by a largely spontaneous process of people moving to the vicinity of people of the same origin. Unwillingness to learn the language of the country, lack of respect to women, and forcing group members to follow strict cultural norms have been cited by critics of multiculturalism.

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No-one can deny the importance of groups in society. Group identities are an important source for societal self-organisation. Their rights are guaranteed by national constitutions and EU treaties, including the right to worship, right of association and, in some countries, the right to use a minority language in public life.

Problems arise when group claims go beyond what is acceptable. This includes claims by Islamic hardliners of legal religious jurisdiction over areas of cities or members of a particular religious community. Multiculturalist liberals occasionally join the chorus. The majority of claims about areas in West European cities where even the police is afraid to go are urban myths. But that does not mean the increasing tendency towards 'self-policing' by local Hizba (sharia police) in many West European urban neighbourhoods, especially in France, Spain and Belgium, is not a problem or should be tolerated. When the multiculturalist ideology has

instilled fear among politicians, teachers, social workers and the police, it can be too late, as the UK's Rotherham child abuse scandal shows.

European and North American approaches

In response to the failure of multiculturalism, the Council of Europe developed the concept of interculturalism in the 2000s. Interculturalism is based on the notion of equality and human rights and includes a political culture that values diversity, democratic citizenship, civil society and participation. Whilst this concept correctly sets out the need to focus on the individual, not on the group, it puts perhaps too much hope on dialogue and does not explain how mutual respect and understanding translate into societal integration. So far, the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue of 2008 has not generated a significant policy response in national parliaments across the EU, although EU bodies and civil society institutions use the intercultural concept in their activities.

Elements of interculturalism could be used to developing a viable political alternative for Europe for the twenty-first century. Civil society bodies, national parliaments, political parties and EU institutions would need to get involved to generate practical proposals.

Europeans could also learn from their North American brethren. Perhaps we need a dose of the 'American dream' which, according to one definition, means that life should be better and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. Although this dream may turn out a delusion for some Americans and the old racial divisions remain open, the concept nevertheless leads to fuller integration of newcomers than is the case in Europe. Individuals are not asked to relinquish their culture but to develop a symbolic allegiance to the US flag. The emphasis is on maintaining one's culture while adopting and internalising the core principles of the US constitution, thereby creating a strong overarching identity.

Alternatively we might want to look at Canadian multiculturalism, a concept that the country's right and left parties subscribe to. The Canadian model is different from its European counterpart. Unlike the European counterpart the Canadian model has been defined in legislation. It stresses integration into society, the teaching of national languages (English and French) and equal representation of ethnic groups in different spheres of public life. In many ways, the Canadian multiculturalism can be declared a success. This is despite problems, such as a failed attempt by the Ontario Province in 2005 to tolerate sharia in the legal system, an attempt that was toppled by a coalition of Canadians of different ethnic backgrounds.

Any new concepts need to primarily deal with immigrants and their descendants as individual citizens, with the same legal and civic obligations as an indigenous citizen. It may be argued that Europe's ethno-centric culture makes such a civic equality difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, Europe has been able to overcome ethnic conflicts in the past: perhaps there are lessons to be learned from that painful history, and perhaps these lessons can be applied to the question of living along with recent newcomers and their offspring. Experimenting with integration at the local and regional levels should also be encouraged.

Steps in integration

There are many practical steps that can be taken in parallel, or even before conceptual alternatives to multiculturalism are created in Europe. Countries in Europe can benefit from the genuine desire that many immigrants have, to identify with the core principles of the constitutions of their new home countries while maintaining elements of their own culture.

For example, immigrants and their descendants need access to jobs and managerial positions. The private sector has probably gone the furthest down this road. The public sector and the political society could learn from the more meritocratic approach of European companies.

European societies also need to put less faith in minority organisations

that purport to have privileged insight into the habits of a religious or ethnic group. Many minority ethnic and equality NGOs undertake valuable work that helps immigrants and their descendants integrate into society. Others command little respect even among people that they claim to represent, and their identity politics is destined to fail.

Engaging the local imam or another religious leader is likely to have only a limited effect, not only because of the diverse nature of the immigrant population but also because many newcomers are as secular as any secular European.

Deradicalisation of radical Muslim individuals as well as anti-terrorism activities are necessary measures that address the symptoms but not the causes of violent jihadism. As long as there is underdevelopment, extreme income disparities, lack of civil society as well as civil wars and international conflict in North Africa and the Middle East, Europe will have to contend with bearers of radical ideologies.

Role for the centre-right

Also European political parties at the EU and national levels have roles to play in creating a sense of common purpose. These parties could also be more active in offering membership and places on election lists to immigrants and their descendants.

Parties of the centre-right, including Christian Democratic parties, have a particularly large potential in tapping into the conservatism and religious leanings of some parts of the immigrant population. They could appeal to the entrepreneurial spirit and the habits of self-sufficiency that are the second nature to many immigrants.

They could more strongly emphasise the positive story of diversity (without its dreamy collectivist content) that creates a competitive advantage for Europe. They could persuasively argue that – if accompanied by integration policies that insist on basic values and shared citizenship – immigration enhances innovation and is associated with increased trade

and economic growth. They could invest energy in explaining to the voters that although the short-run costs of immigration are often borne by the local level, the long-term benefits are shared at the national level.

The centre-right parties do not need to change their values and lose their traditional voters. But they may widen their perceptions of the kind of politician who is able to carry those values and the type of voter who can subscribe to those values. As an example, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) is taking encouraging steps on this path.

New allegiances

Europe's evolution from an ever-warring bunch of countries to a successful economic and peace organisation and the gradual acceptance of large groups of immigrants into North American and European societies show that ethnic and religious identities are compatible with allegiances to shared values. These stories prove that the liberal democratic framework and individual freedoms do not need to be compromised in the process.

The challenge of diversity lies in creating strong national and European allegiances that are compatible with ethnic and religious group belonging on one hand, and individual rights on the other hand. Or, as Robert Putnam put it, in creating a new, broader sense of 'we'. This is one of the big European projects of the coming decades.