

NECE Conference 2016
Crossing Borders. Migration and Citizenship Education in Europe

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A keynote by David Goodhart

As the Dutch writer Paul Scheffer has put it Europe “underestimates” its ability to control its collective border and “overestimates” its ability to integrate people into its rich, liberal societies. I agree with him.

I disagree with what seems to be the assumption behind at least some of this conference that we must defend something called Europe’s “cosmopolitan values” as the core of a new European identity. European identity takes precedence over national identity in precisely ZERO EU states and will never do so. International values yes, cosmopolitan values no.

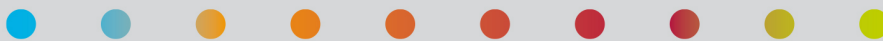
And the alternative to cosmopolitanism is not xenophobia. I do not believe that the vast majority of our populations ARE xenophobic. Just look at the liberalisation of opinion over the past two generations on race, gender and homosexuality. But most people also believe that there is such a thing as society – and societies are not just random collections of individuals but complex organisms based on habits of trust and cooperation and a shared language, history and way of life.

Most people in Europe want to live in open, outward looking societies but they think that is quite compatible with moderate national feeling and with fellow citizen favouritism – generally speaking giving preference to fellow citizens in the allocation of public goods. They tend to be anti-“mass immigration” but are not usually anti “immigrant”.

Extreme liberalism – the idea of a post-national, borderless world in which universal rights are at least as recognised as national rights – has helped to create the populist backlash. Yes, it is our fault. The fault of the highly educated, liberal-minded political and academic elites who have mistaken their own group preferences for the general interest.

And the idea that 1.5 million refugees a year is trivial for a continent of 500 million ignores the cumulative effect of such small changes and the fact that they are not spread evenly but are mainly coming to 30 or 40 urban areas in north-western Europe. Illegal Mexican immigration into the US started as a trickle in the late 1970s and in another 20 years the US will be one third Hispanic – one of the factors behind Donald Trump.





But I think there is a way out of the mess we are in. And that is to fashion a humane “temporary citizen” programme for the 21st century. The idea has a bad press because of what are seen as the failures of the guest worker programme in Germany and also because of the tendency of human rights legislation to erode the distinction between citizens and non-citizens. But if Europe wants to remain open to moderate levels of immigration both for economic reasons and for humanitarian reasons in relation to refugee crises “we need a much clearer dividing line between full and temporary citizens”. Hostility to outsiders will be much reduced if we know that the relationship with them is short-term, instrumental and (in the case economic immigrants) mutually beneficial – temporary citizens cannot be accused of failing to integrate because integration is not an issue. This way both welfare states and ideas of national citizenship can be ring-fenced from short-term immigration flows, as both Branko Milanovic and Martin Ruhs have argued.

Of course this is not simple to manage but it has to be the way we go if we want to combine openness with the desire to preserve relatively stable societies that put the interests of national citizens first.

