

NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Rethinking Citizenship Education in European Migration Societies

Political Strategies - Social Changes - Educational Concepts

Conference Paper

Statement for the Discussion Panel

“Europe and its Multinational Project of Integration: How to Succeed?”

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I. On the Situation of Migration and Integration in Central Europe

As other European regions, and also as Europe as such, the region of Central Europe bears only a light reference to a geographical region, referring more to political definition of a certain area. In case of Central Europe (CE), the use of the term can be ascribed as an achievement to the former President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel, who managed to replace the term Eastern Europe because the latter term invoked opposition between Western and Eastern Europe and did not go along well with the return of the Central European nations to “the European family” after the fall of communism. Therefore, the term refers to the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, which have all recently joined the EU.

In short, the given countries have undergone tremendous changes from the late nineties up to now, trying to reconstitute themselves and repair the damage to social fabric inflicted by communism. At the same time they started facing some of the problems characteristic of the “old” EU countries, which often had no solution to offer themselves. One of such problems is migration. Since I am supposed to characterize the nature of migration and integration flows in the CE region, I will have to neglect a lot of differences in the given countries and focus on just a few of many common patterns.

First, let me focus on what did not happen as a pattern of integration: it was expected that post-communist societies of the region, which were so limited in terms of multiculturalism during communism would be more open and in a certain sense more compassionate with newly arriving migrants, partly because a lot of Central Europeans were migrants themselves or had a family member, who was a migrant. However, this did not turn out to be true – levels of xenophobia were rising coupled with animosity for national minorities. State policy response was rather slow and still leaves the impression of following more or less by inertia EU requirements than looking for their own specific path, which would be prosperous and adequate for the given societies. We should not forget that still some of the CE nationals migrate heavily into other EU states, such as Polish nationals to the UK or Ireland leaving a lot of blank spots on the local job markets and, thus, creating changes both in sending and receiving countries.

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If we speak more specifically about the types of migration into the CE countries, they tend to be the following: illegal or semi-legal transit migration, inflow of refugees, asylum seekers and temporary protected persons, multi-form short-term flows of labor within the region and from or to other regions, seasonal movements of migrant workers, immigration for settlement (including re-emigration), not to mention huge movements of the members of many ethnic groups following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, either between its former republics or to beyond its boundaries. Given the above mentioned fact that the countries have undergone several huge societal changes, such as reconstituting society including some basic institutions and instruments destroyed by communist regime, changes of political and business elites and relatively shortly afterwards accession to the EU, response to these migration flows tended to be and still to a certain degree remains somewhat unsystematic. Still, the levels of migration influx are much lower than in almost all old EU countries, which gives hope that some of the mistakes made by the old EU societies will not be repeated by the new EU countries. However, since classical experiments in social sciences are not possible, it remains to be observed how the future cooperation will look like.

II. How to Succeed?

Process of integration in European Union countries has two developing and somewhat separated sides: one is integration of the EU countries as such, including integration of new accession (and regularly acceding countries), the other is a far more visible and contested integration of newcomers, immigrants and refugees, i.e. groups of so-called new minorities. From the social point of view, this is a very challenging and hard to manage complicated range of problems because simultaneously the EU is constituting itself and absorbing newcomers from cultures and countries with very often quite different historical and political backgrounds. This requires quite an effort on the part of the European society, its institutions, policies, but also its citizens.

If we want to answer the question how to succeed in managing multicultural Europe bearing in mind the goal of integration, we have to ask the question: did we fail, and if so, where? Do information and data warning us of failure of integration and multiculturalism, which we get from media and encounter in everyday life, signal that, although various policies were applied across Europe and although Europe has been and still is an attractive migration destination, this project of multicultural integration, understood as peaceful coexistence of cultures in one political community, European societies managed to produce an underclass consisting of immigrants and their descendants? My answer to this is: failure was not on the part of multicultural policies (although there are opinions that multiculturalism is European weakness, coming from bad colonial conscience), because there has been no single policy and there has not been a single isolated area where multiculturalism has been applied. What failed in my opinion was civic education and political emancipation in the aspect of coexistence of various groups as well as enhancing responsibilities, which the status of citizen entails, not stressing only rights and liberties.

The other important aspect, which seriously affected "the European multicultural project", was the crisis of the European welfare state and the overall discussions on neo-liberalism approach vs. the social assistance state. Many critics pointed at some of the dangerous disadvantages of the welfare state concept - that is paternalism on the one side and complementary dependence and overall passiveness of the citizens on the other. This affected integration even more so with newcomers as a class of inhabitants being more vulnerable to social stratification. Welfare rights were not considered enough in its culturally conditioned aspect and consequences for integration. Instead, they sometimes provided means for hostile isolation, which created an atmosphere and channels for terrorist actions, which shocked our societies.

And finally, I think that Europe should revise its concept of humanitarian migration, which currently is a source of tremendous chaos in all aspects of the European asylum policy and consequently for integration issues. The EU should make clear whether it can support the asylum concept and set conditions for integration of successful asylum applicants or revise the concept and restrict the number of humanitarian AND increase the number of commercial migration. The EU still has no efficient policy of skilled labor migration.

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In sum, the answer how to succeed, provided we agree on what success means is: increase civic education stressing obligations for all, make political participation more inclusive, reduce welfare state effects where they produce isolation and passiveness, revise and redefine asylum policy and set clear and attractive conditions for skilled labor migration. In the reasonable time horizon, these will be some of the most pressing European tasks.