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POLICY BRIEFING

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A Mosque and Church stand side by side in Portsmouth, England. © Aaron Jell, 2012

- **How is Europe's model of multiculturalism changing in the face of contemporary challenges?**
- **What are the dominant societal paradigms co-existing within Europe today?**

Interculturalism: Europe and its Muslims

Summary: Against a backdrop of strained and changing relationships with its Muslim minorities, the simmering debate in Europe about multiculturalism versus assimilation has come to the boil. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, stated in October 2010 that "multiculturalism in Germany [Multikulti] had failed, completely failed". In February 2011, both Prime Minister David Cameron and President Nicholas Sarkozy also declared multiculturalism a failure; Sarkozy endorsed assimilation as the alternative. Others argue that both assimilation and multiculturalism have failed. These dramatic statements challenge interpretation and policy analysis: there must be a better model. This study suggests 'interculturalism' as the solution.

Introduction

Europe's relationship with its Muslim minorities has been under stress and changing for some years, under the impact of several driving forces. There is awareness that this substantial and demographically growing minority category (roughly 8% of the population) is here to stay, and not, as earlier supposed, a matter of temporary immigration. Radical Islam among a small minority worries the population as a whole. Attacks by radical home-grown terrorists add a major security dimension. Instances of urban riots, which have had little to do with radical Islam, fuel societal tensions and awareness of the problems of the new Muslim underclasses. There is therefore an increasingly prevalent view that European multiculturalism is not working. In response there has been a widespread policy shift in favour of measures to integrate Muslim minorities more effectively, marking a move away from the earlier variant of multiculturalism to a middle-ground between multiculturalism and assimilation.

Europe and its Muslims: In search of sound societal models

Some definitions

Multiculturalism is a hazardous term widely used with many different meanings, mixing analysis, political statements and emotions. Here it means a situation where ethno-cultural-religious minorities are, or are thought of, as distinct communities and public policy encourages this distinctiveness.

Assimilation is the polar opposite of multiculturalism. It means someone from a minority immigrant group has totally blended into their adopted country, in terms of citizenship, mastery of the language, attitudes and perceived identity. In policy terms, assimilation means refusal to admit or recognise distinct communities. No policy measures should be based on minority ethno-cultural-religious differences. Assimilation suggests that the responsibility to integrate rests entirely with the immigrant.

Interculturalism is a new term for

the compromise between the polar opposites of multiculturalism and assimilation. It is sympathetic and respectful towards ethno-cultural religious minorities. Selected measures target disadvantaged situations. It also aims at ensuring commitment to the values, history and traditions of the host nation. This may include integration policies and efforts to water down excessive distinctiveness or segregation. It is sympathetic towards people from immigrant families perceiving themselves as having a hybrid identity, Anglo-Indian, or French-Algerian for example.

Integration relates to active measures to improve the competence of minority groups in the host country's language and to increase awareness of its values, history and traditions. It refers also to a range of policies facilitating social and labour market inclusion. These mark movement along the spectrum from multiculturalism towards assimilation. The end-point of integration processes is not pre-defined. It could be towards either interculturalism or assimilation. The European Commission understands integration as a two-way process.

Heterogeneity of Muslims resident in Europe

Europe's Muslims are diverse, among and within individual European countries. Policies also have multiple components: there is no pure model type in practice in contemporary Europe, for either multiculturalism or assimilation. There is a macro reality behind the predominant societal model and at the policy level explicit or implicit choices have to be made, fitting somewhere on the spectrum between multiculturalism and assimilation.

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Policy Variables

There are many policy variables for determining whether policy tends towards the multicultural or assimilationist ends of the spectrum, or towards the middle ground of interculturalism. These are given in Box 1. These policy variables may relate to the three paradigms – multiculturalism, interculturalism and assimilation. Fine gradations of policy are possible for each policy variable and the complete policy set. Given policy variables may be located at various points on the spectrum. Country case studies demonstrate this.

Country Case Studies

The Netherlands has moved most dramatically from multiculturalism to interculturalism at the level of actual policy, but with influential, extreme right-wing politicians advocating radical alternatives of assimilation or even expulsion. From a structure that recognised and supported different religious

Box 1. List of policy variables whose settings will contribute to shaping the societal model in the spectrum of multiculturalism-interculturalism-assimilation

1. Citizenship and political participation
   a. Ease of obtaining citizenship
   b. Practices of dual citizenship
   c. Integration course and tests
   d. Voting in local elections
   e. Role of ethno-religious representative organizations
2. Education
   a. State support of Islamic schools?
   b. State support for special classes (languages) within regular schools?
3. Housing
   a. Attempts to de-concentrate ethnic minorities
   b. Attempts to organise urbanization with regard to ethnic groups (gentrification)
4. Health care
   a. Meals
   b. Chaplaincy
   c. Translation services
5. Employment
   a. Affirmative action targeting ethnic groups
   b. The scope of the anti-discrimination legislation
6. Policing
   a. Ethnic profiling complaints, counter-actions
   b. Recruitment of minority groups to police
7. Allowance of Islamic practices and symbols
   a. Construction and recognition of mosques
   b. Muslim burials
   c. Provisions for halal slaughtering of animals
   d. Islamic call to prayer in public
   e. Restrictions or tolerance of headscarves or burkas, in public buildings or spaces
   f. Wearing of religious symbols

Source: This list draws on M. Alexander, "Comparing local policies towards migrants: An analytical framework, a typology and preliminary survey results", in R. Penninx, K. Kraal, M. Martiniello and S. Vertovec (eds), *Citizenship in European Cities: Immigrants, local politics and integrations policies*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

and secular groups (so-called 'pillarisation'), the policy set now includes off-shore integration programmes as prerequisites for would-be immigrants, notably learning the Dutch language and passing tests in their home country, even for family reunion cases (labelled 'inburgering'). This is more of an extremely restrictive immigration policy than an internal integration policy.

In Belgium, the Flemish region inherited a structure recognising distinct groups from its shared history with the Netherlands. Francophone Belgium has remained closer to the French tradition of the secular state. Bilingual Brussels is a complex blend of both. An official representative body is a precondition for various state subsidies, notably for funding religious education in schools and religious personnel (imams). As in The Netherlands, the term 'inburgering' denotes policies and programmes to integrate Muslim minorities, influenced by extreme rightwing political parties. In April 2010, Belgium's federal government almost unanimously adopted a law banning the burka, yet to be implemented. The wearing of the hijab in schools and public administrations remains debated. The tendency is towards a ban. The policy set is moving away from multiculturalism, but so far remains an intercultural compromise.

Germany is also a complex federal case, with separate competences involved at federal, state and local levels. At the federal level the traditionally ethnic condition for naturalisation has given way to a more open, residence-based criterion, especially for those born in Germany of immigrant parents

– a move towards an intercultural approach. Education policies are largely assimilationist, although in Berlin Islamic religious education has been introduced in state schools. Berlin excludes religious symbols such as the headscarf in public employment including schools. Hamburg is more liberal and has no such ban. At the local level there is a tendency towards more pragmatic and inclusive policies. Yet public opinion and political discourse are moving in a distinctly right-wing populist direction, with openly racist arguments about defending European values against the Muslim invasion.

In Britain, early post-war immigration policy operated under a laissez-faire assumption of assimilation. But later, significant elements of multiculturalism were developed, from education and employment measures to urban regeneration and policing. The political context of the last decade has led to a complex recalibration of policy. Citizenship rules have moved in an assimilationist direction from being based solely on length of legal residence to including programmes and obligations aimed at developing 'a sense of civic identity and shared values', with tests of language competence and knowledge of the UK. Immigration policy has been progressively tightened and tied to skills. However in response to terrorist threats authorities work in a multicultural mode with representative organisations of Muslim communities, for better 'community cohesion'. These apparently divergent trends reveal a complex, hybrid interculturalism.

In Spain Muslim minority groups are relatively recent compared with the other countries studied. Consequently there is no established policy doctrine or model. Spain's Law on Religious Freedoms (1980) gives limited multicultural content to the policy set. There are no separate and distinct Muslim schools, only guaranteed Muslim religious instruction in schools where demanded. A political debate has arisen over the case for integration policies, which so far has not been translated into actual policy. The overall situation is a hybrid of multicultural, assimiliationist and intercultural modes.

EU policies have also undergone important developments. In 2000 the EU adopted two non-discrimination directives: first, concerning racial equality and second, employment equality embodying a 'rights-based' approach. By the end of 2006, these directives were national law in all member states, with significant impacts on norms, structures and practices. The Hague Programme (2004) set out 11 'common basic principles' for immigrant integration policies. These highlight a 'two-way process of mutual accommodation' of immigrants and the host country population. Overall they represent a move towards assimilation. The Stockholm Programme (2009-2014) places fundamental rights at the heart of integration policy, calling for 'proactive policies for migrants and their rights'.

Policy Implications
How should we interpret the overall trend in policymaking? Some things

There is no pure model type in practice for either multiculturalism or assimilation in contemporary Europe.

are clear:

The legal rights-based non-discrimination paradigm is deeply embedded at the level of EU and therefore national law. This can be described as either passive liberal multiculturalism or support for assimilation. But active multiculturalist policies on the part of member states are on the wane in countries such as the Netherlands and the UK where they were most explicit, and elsewhere (in France and Germany) such policies are being explicitly rejected at the highest political level.

Immigration and citizenship policies have become more restrictive and conditional on positive integration criteria and tests, moving in the assimilationist direction. On the other hand, some extremely exclusionary provisions have been moderated in favour of general rights (e.g. the shift in German citizenship law). Major terrorist acts in the last decade and the securitisation of multicultural relations have had an impact, pushing in favour of active integration policies incorporating obligations alongside rights, while at the same time underlining the importance of organisations representing Muslim minorities. Overall, the political landscape appears to favour a compromise middle-ground between assimilation and multiculturalism, which may be called 'interculturalism'.

A powerful movement of public opinion and political action continues to push the policy set more towards assimilation. So far this has been limited, with interculturalism occupying space between the two polar types. If the European extreme right gains further support for racist and exclusionary policies the scene is set for the most fundamental challenge to European political values since World War II.
In the context of the revolutionary implosion of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, the EU is now debating how it can best support Arab democracy. But if at home the EU develops increasingly exclusionary or populist assimilation policies towards the Diaspora communities of these same countries, it will find itself entangled in a web of political contradictions and hypocrisy over its declared values. The promotion of an 'intercultural' compromise or model, with this term being used as a label for a careful and complex blend of policy instruments, is becoming more imperative.

Credits

Further reading

Emerson M. (ed.), 2009. Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe: Typologies of radicalisation in Europe's Muslim Communities, CEPS, Brussels, 2009

Emerson M. (ed.), 2011. Interculturalism: Europe and its Muslims in search of sound societal models, CEPS, Brussels, 2011

Zizek S., 2010. "Liberal Multiculturalism Masks an Old Barbarism with a Human Face", Guardian, 3 October 2010

MICROCON, or 'A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict' is a five-year research programme funded by the European Commission, which takes an innovative micro level, multidisciplinary approach to the study of the conflict cycle.

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