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Reframing Europe's "Multiculturalism" Debates

Transatlantic Convergence? Immigrant Integration in Canada and Europe

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At first glance, Canada and Europe seem to be diverging dramatically in their approach to immigrant integration. While Canada has not been immune to the rising global anxieties about immigration, support for the multicultural approach seems relatively high, and none of the national political parties is proposing to abolish or retreat from it. In Europe, in contrast, we are witnessing a pervasive backlash against multiculturalism. The widespread perception is that multiculturalism has failed – “utterly failed” according to Chancellor Merkel – and that it is time for a sharp change in direction.

For Canadians, the European reaction prompts several surprises. The first surprise is triggered by the description of the multicultural approach being rejected. Multiculturalism, we are told by the *Economist* magazine, is “the idea that immigrants can recreate their culture” in their new home. Germans worry that multiculturalism means *Parallelgesellschaften* or parallel societies; and the British prime minister tells us that “Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream”. This sounds strange to Canadian ears. Although Canadians are much more supportive of immigration than their European counterparts, they expect newcomers to integrate into the mainstream of the country.

The second surprise concerns the new policies that are advocated to replace the ‘failed’ approach. This new policy model, often referred to as civic integration, emphasizes the active integration of immigrants into the economic and social life of the country. It also insists on a muscular defence of liberal democratic principles; and requires newcomers to develop competence in the language of the host country and acquire knowledge of its history, norms and institutions. Success in adapting to the country is to be assessed through a variety of

mechanisms, including the introduction of written citizenship tests. Canadian confusion is now complete. All of these have been elements of the Canadian approach to immigrant integration for a very long time.

Clearly, closer inspection is required. This briefing note argues that a closer look blurs the simple picture of transatlantic divergence. Beneath the image of a widening gap, there are important elements of convergence between Europe and Canada. There are two reasons for this. First, the retreat from multiculturalism in Europe is more complete at the level of discourse than policy. At the level of multicultural policies, the story is one of stability, even growth, as much as retrenchment. In many European countries, the new emphasis on integration is being layered over multicultural initiatives introduced in earlier decades. Second, as just noted, many of the new policies celebrated as evidence of a U-turn away from multiculturalism resemble programs that have long been part of immigrant integration in Canada.

The critical issue thus becomes whether the combination of multiculturalism and civic integration are as compatible in the European context as they seem to be in Canada. Here the answer is more complex, as different models of civic integration are emerging in Europe, and some are much more easily combined with a multicultural approach than others.

To examine these issues, this note first looks at the state of multiculturalism policies, especially in Europe. It then shifts to the nature of civic integration, as it is rolling out in Europe, and assesses its potential compatibility with multicultural norms. A brief conclusion reflects on the implications of the analysis.

Multicultural backlash?

Interpretations of contemporary European experience suggest that we are living through a major rupture, a fundamental change in direction. At the level of discourse, this is clearly true, but what about at the level of policies? If multicultural discourse has been routed, are multicultural policies being torn out by the roots? New evidence from the Multiculturalism Policy Index gives a different answer to this question than one might expect from current political rhetoric.

The Multiculturalism Policy Index is a scholarly research project that tracks the evolution of multiculturalism policies across 21 democratic countries. The project is designed to provide information about multiculturalism policies in a standardized format that aids comparative research and contributes to the understanding of state-minority relations.¹ The Index for immigrant minorities measures the extent to which countries adopt policies which recognize, support and accommodate the ethnic diversity that immigration brings in its wake. Each of the eight indicators that make up the Index is intended to capture a policy dimension where liberal-democratic states faced a choice about whether or not to take a multicultural turn and to become more accommodating and supportive of minorities. To track change over time, the Index measures the eight indicators in 1980, 2000 and 2010.

The component indicators are:

1. Constitutional, legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism, at the central and/or regional and municipal levels;
2. The adoption of multiculturalism in school curriculum;
3. The inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in the mandate of public media or media licensing;
4. Exemptions from dress-codes, either by statute or by court cases;
5. Allowing of dual citizenship;
6. The funding of ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities;
7. The funding of bilingual education or mother-tongue instruction;
8. Affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups.

Table 1: Immigrant Minorities

	Total Scores		
	1980	2000	2010
Australia Australie	5	8	8
Austria Autriche	0	1	1.5
Belgium Belgique	1	3	5.5
Canada Canada	5	7.5	7.5
Denmark Danemark	0	0.5	0
Finland Finlande	0	1.5	6
France France	1	2	2
Germany Allemagne	0	2	2.5
Greece Grèce	0.5	0.5	2.5
Ireland Irlande	1	1.5	3
Italy Italie	0	1.5	1
Japan Japon	0	0	0
Netherlands Les Pays-Bas	2.5	5.5	2
New Zealand Nouvelle-Zélande	2.5	5	5.5
Norway Norvège	0	0	3.5
Portugal Portugal	1	2	3.5
Spain Espagne	0	1	3.5
Sweden Suède	3	5	7
Switzerland Suisse	0	1	1
United Kingdom Royaume-Uni	2.5	5.5	5.5
United States États-Unis	3	3	3

Source: Multiculturalism Policy Index: www.queensu.ca/mcp

The results for immigrant minorities, which appear in Table 1, are clear. Canada started earlier and has gone further down the multicultural road than European countries. But some European countries also moved in this direction in the 1980s and 1990s, and there has not been a general retreat since 2000. There has been a significant reduction in the Netherlands, and modest ones (from a low base) in Denmark and Italy. But the last decade has also seen a strengthening of multiculturalism policies in a number of countries, including Belgium, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. In other countries, the scores have increased marginally or remained stable. Overall, the pattern of multicultural policy in Europe has been a modest strengthening. The average score among European countries rose from 0.7 in 1980 to 2.1 in 2000 and 3.1 in 2010. The image of a pervasive backlash obviously obscures a more complex story.

Civic integration

Civic integration – as defined by the Council of the European Union and others – emphasizes the importance of immigrants integrating more fully into the mainstream of society, and advances a number of core principles. First, employment is a key part of integration. Second, integration requires respect for liberal-democratic values, such as the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and equalities such as gender equality, and the rule of law. Third, basic knowledge of the host society’s language, history and institutions is indispensable to integration. Fourth, anti-discrimination laws and policies are also essential.

A wide range of European countries have adopted a stronger emphasis on integration at different stages of the immigration process, including initial entry, renewed residency, and naturalization, implementing the approach through a range of tests, courses, and contracts. According to an index designed to measure the adoption of civic integration policies (CIVIX), this approach has spread rapidly in Europe. In 1997, such policies were largely absent; in 2009, such policies were much more prevalent: on the CIVIX scale, the average EU-15 country score was only 0.56 out of a possible 6.0 in 1997 but had risen to 2.3 by 2009.²

So we see an interesting trend over the last decade: a modest strengthening of MCPs and a significant increase in civic integration requirements. The question thus becomes whether these two policy strategies are compatible or whether they live in deep tension with each other, such that any attempt to combine them would be inherently unstable.

Canadian experience is perhaps helpful here. The Canadian approach to immigrant incorporation is best described as “multicultural integration”. The multiculturalism component of the model is quite broad, reflecting most of the elements in the Index: the recognition of multicultural diversity as a core feature of Canadian life in the constitution, in legislation and in the curriculum used in schools; the requirement that broadcasters reflect cultural diversity in their programming; exemptions from official dress codes³; the acceptance of dual citizenship; grants to ethnic groups; and affirmative action - employment equity as it is called in Canada - for disadvantaged immigrant groups.

The Canadian approach simultaneously embraces a heavy emphasis on integration, including the primary components of the European model of civic integration. The federal and provincial governments provide significant adjustment assistance to new arrivals, as well as language training both at the basic level and at more advanced levels for immigrants in need of occupational-specific language skills. Federal expenditures on these programs have grown dramatically over time, tripling in the last decade to an estimated \$1 billion in 2010-11. In addition, Canada has a long-standing tradition of encouraging newcomers to learn about its history, traditions and political institutions. Applicants for citizenship must pass a written test of their ability to speak English or French and their knowledge of Canadian history, geography, political institutions and traditions.

The Canadian model also privileges the protection of liberal democratic principles and anti-discrimination mechanisms. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms represents a “muscular form of liberalism” – to borrow Prime Minister Cameron’s words – which is entrenched in the constitution and trumps ordinary legislation, including the Multiculturalism Act. The Charter, together with federal and provincial human rights commissions, has protected newcomers from discrimination at the hands of majorities. But the Charter also represents a legal frame which sets boundaries to multiculturalism, defining limits to the range of cultural traditions considered acceptable, and helping to ensure that accommodation of difference does not slide into a justification for discrimination or the denial of basic equalities, such as the equality of men and women.

The Canadian approach thus combines multiculturalism and integration. The compatibility of the two components of the model depends in two factors. First, the instruments of integration are voluntary. Language training and integration programs are provided by governments free of charge; and there is no linkage between participation in them and continued residency or access to social benefits. The only formal leverage is the citizenship test associated with naturalization. Second, the national identity which newcomers are invited to join celebrates diversity. The adoption of bilingualism and multiculturalism in the 1960s and 1970s represented a state-led redefinition of national identity, an effort to deemphasize the historic conception of the country as a British society and to build an identity more reflective of Canada’s cultural complexity. As a result, there are fewer cultural barriers to the integration of newcomers.

What is the pattern in Europe? Is the new emphasis on civic integration there also compatible with multicultural approach to diversity? Here the answer is more complex, as no single model of civic integration is emerging on the continent. European countries display greater divergence today than 15 or 30 years ago in both multiculturalism policies and civic integration policies. As measured by our MCP Index, the divergence in multiculturalism scores — the standard deviation — has increased from 1980 to 2010. (For the 16 European countries covered by the Index, the standard deviations increased from 1.03 in 1980 to 1.76 in 2000 to 2.00 in 2010.) Similarly, the CIVIX index shows a similar divergence in civic integration scores from 1997 to 2009.

Amid the diverse approaches, however, it is possible to discern different models of civic integration, some of which are much more easily combined with a multicultural approach than others. Compatibility depends on the two factors identified in the Canadian case: the level of

pressure brought to bear on immigrants; and the openness of the national identity of the country to diversity. Some European countries have adopted forms of civic integration that are highly compulsory and assimilationist, while others have adopted forms of civic integration policies that are more voluntary and pluralistic.

In European discourse, the level of coercion implicit in civic integration is usually debated in terms of the balance between rights and duties. Some countries have developed voluntary approaches, which emphasize immigrants' right to integrate and provide support programs to assist in the transition. Other countries have made integration a duty, establishing mandatory programs, and denying immigrants access to social rights or even renewal of their residency permits if they fail to pass certain thresholds of integration. Combining this mandatory version of civic integration with a multicultural strategy that accommodates diversity would seem very difficult.

The definition of the national culture that immigrants are expected to join is also critical. Some countries are uneasy with the idea of multiple cultures and identities, and consider excessive attachment to the immigrants' home country or religion as grounds for refusing naturalization. Immigrants are not invited to add a new identity to their old one. Rather, they are expected to either relinquish their old identity or restrict its expression to the privacy of their home. By contrast, other countries are more accepting of the idea that in the contemporary world, people often have multiple identities. These countries tend to see a blend of cultures as a strength, not a weakness, and their integration and naturalization programs set the bar much lower, requiring only a good-faith effort on the part of the immigrant, with the result that immigrants become citizens (and hence start to change society) before they are assimilated.

When we stand back and examine the diverse policy trajectories across Europe as a whole, certain patterns fall into place. At one end of the spectrum, we have countries that adopt what the author of the CIVIX index describes as "prohibitive" citizenship strategies, based on mandatory and assimilative civic integration policies which are designed to make the process difficult. Not surprisingly, the countries in this category (for example, Germany, Austria, Denmark) are also countries that score very low on our MCP Index. At the other end of the spectrum, we have countries that adopt "enabling" citizenship strategies, based on voluntary and open civic integration. Not surprisingly, these are also countries that have increased their MCP score since 2000 (for example, Sweden, Finland). Arguably, Britain might be included in this group. In between, we have a range of countries with intermediary forms and levels of both civic integration and MCPs. In the larger story of the role of immigration in Europe, much will depend on whether or not these countries gravitate towards one of the two ends of the spectrum.

Conclusions

The image of a pervasive retreat from multiculturalism and a pivot towards civic integration obscures the complexity of contemporary developments in Europe. It also obscures the reality that multiculturalism and civic integration are not inherently incompatible approaches to diversity. The Canadian approach is best described as "multicultural integration", and some

European countries seem to be edging to variants of this approach, generating an element of transatlantic convergence. But this is not the only pattern emerging in Europe. Some countries are adopting a version of civic integration which is much more compulsory and assimilative. This approach does seem to be in deep tension with a multicultural approach to diversity, producing a counter-trend towards transatlantic divergence. The Atlantic is getting bigger and smaller at the same time.

Nevertheless, the larger conclusion that flows from this analysis is that a form of multicultural integration remains a live option for Western democracies, both in the new world and in Europe. We stress this option, not simply for the sake of analytical completeness, but because we believe it is an option that warrants serious consideration, on both normative and empirical grounds.

Endnotes

¹ For a fuller explanation of the MCP Index and the documentation that underpins it, see: www.queensu.ca/mcp.

² For background on CIVIX, see Sara Goodman, “Integration Requirements for Integration’s Sake? Identifying, Categorizing and Comparing Civic Integration Policies,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* volume 36 (5), 2010, pp. 753–72.

³ There are regional differences within the country on some of these dimensions, for example, the Quebec provincial government has adopted restrictions on wearing the niqab while seeking public services.