

WORKING PAPER:

The Integrationist Paradigm in EU's Migration Policy: Investigating European Commission's Discourses on Immigrant Integration¹

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Amidst recent immigrant and refugee arrivals and in the context of controversies related to security, Islam and the alleged failure of multiculturalism, *immigrant integration* is high on the European political agenda. Drawing on a wider research project that examines the knowledge co-production on integration across policy and research in the European context, the present working paper summarizes preliminary findings on one of the case studies, European Union's official immigrant integration policy. The European Commission's discourse on migrant integration has been powerful in subtly steering both national policies and political attitudes towards integration. Yet despite being a major agenda-setting actor in this sense, it has been surprisingly understudied in the integration policy literature. The paper looks at policy documents, funding schemes and public statements issued by EU institutions, focusing mainly on the European Commission, to make sense of ruptures and continuities in EU's narrative on "integration". Several political strategies, sometimes mutually opposing, are identified that together make up the changing integration policy at EU level. The 2000s saw an increased emphasis on the active participation of TCNs and their contribution notably to the economy, which paved the way for discourses on "earned" rights that presuppose a proactive, independent individual. At present, these agendas are at times overshadowed by concerns with security and preservation of an exclusionary community, implicitly defined in terms of Judeo-Christian values, whiteness and Europe's exceptionalism.

Keywords: European Union, integration policy, integrationism, discourse, decolonial

1. Introduction

Amidst recent immigrant and refugee arrivals and in the context of controversies related to security, Islam and the alleged failure of multiculturalism, immigrant integration has remained high on the European political agenda in the past decade. There is hardly a member state of the European Union without a comprehensive integration policy, which includes measures on improvement of language skills, "integration courses" intended to familiarize migrants with the local "way of life", and measures to increase employability, among others. Proof of "integration", obtained by way of passing formal tests of knowledge of the host country's history and customs have long been used as conditions for the acquisition of citizenship in a number of EU member

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states, including the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Denmark, in addition to most Anglophone countries worldwide. Since the turn of the twenty first century, integration tests have been extended to the right to remain, or permanent residence, threatening those who fail with an insecure status or even expulsion. Since 2005, following the Dutch example, at least five other European countries have introduced so-called pre-departure integration requirements, where migrants who want to join family members must learn the host country's language and customs before even being admitted (c.f. Bonjour, 2014). Integration tests for obtaining permanent residence and integration-from-abroad measures are two examples of how integration policy overlaps with and morphs into immigration control (see also Goodman, 2011; Joppke, 2007).

Critical migration scholars are already questioning the complicity of migration research with states' efforts to curb, control, surveil and assimilate non-citizens. Many notably warn against an (unintentional) reproduction of historically contingent and colonially imposed hierarchies through integrationist discourses employed by policymakers and adopted by researchers (Blankvoort et al., 2021; Bonjour, 2020; Dahinden, 2016; Favell, 2014; Hadj Abdou, 2019; Korteweg, 2017; McPherson, 2010; Schinkel, 2017). Aligning with this critique, the present working paper deals with integration(ist) discourses at EU policy level. Discussing early insights from a research project investigating the knowledge (co)production on immigrant integration in policy and research, this paper contributes to the critical debate by focusing on a crucial, yet understudied subject in this respect: EU institutions.

The European Union has largely been neglected in the literature on integration policy. The few empirical studies that have approached integration from a de-naturalizing perspective have predominantly focused on national cases (e.g., Favell, 2001b for Britain and France; Schinkel, 2017 for the Netherlands). Perhaps one reason for this lack is that, from the perspective of a policy analyst, the European Union has no competence to regulate migrant integration and therefore, apart from several directives, official EU policy is largely non-binding. However, this does not mean that the EU has little to say on the subject. Quite the contrary, EU discourse on migrant integration has been powerful in subtly steering both national policies and political attitudes towards integration (Geddes & Achtnich, 2015; Pratt, 2015). This has been accomplished not only by establishing itself as a moral authority on the matter, but also through elaborate financial schemes involving both programmatic and commissioned research. Such funding, in addition to supporting the dispersion of integration policy measures across member states, has also had its role in shaping a social scientific research agenda that, on its part, helped legitimize and normalize integrationist political strategies. Overall, the enormous growth in research networks and research institutes dependent on EU funding has been remarkable, with terms of strict policy relevance increasingly being dictated by the European Commission to researchers (Favell, 2014, p. 92). Hence, the role of EU policy in the production of knowledge and the establishing of hegemonic discourses on integration is currently center-stage.

2. Methodology

Understanding the way EU institutions talk about “immigrant integration” and the ways they seek to shape the debate is necessary in order to understand the complexity of the integrationist paradigm in diversity debates in Europe. This means that EU institutions must be understood as

key sites of knowledge production, and their activities with respect to the governmentality of mobility and diversity must be taken as epistemic practices, in addition to being instruments of political power. In doing so I take a Foucauldian approach in the sense that I aim at interrogating the power relations invested in the production of knowledge on “integration”. Power is central to my objective to show that integrationism is a political technique implicated in the normalization of modern-colonial systems of differentiation.

Foucault’s model of power is uniquely positioned to illuminate the interlinkage between power and knowledge and, combined with a decolonial perspective (Lugones, 2010; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2007), leads to exposing the role colonialism and its ongoing forms have in present day power dynamics, where the knowledges, cosmologies and voices of those based in the (postcolonial and postsocialist) “Global South” are subjected to the hegemony of the worldviews of the wealthy “Global North”. Western hegemony over what counts as “true” structures the conversation on diversity and its “management”, producing essentialist and prescriptive narratives of social cohesion, cultural incompatibility, unassimilability, and deservingness around which integrationist agendas are erected. A decolonial and Foucauldian approach helps illuminate how what I call *integrationism* – the idea that “society” should be “integrated” and, for that, “immigrants” should accommodate the expectations of the “majority” to deserve their welcome – is a manifestation of a neocolonial relationship of force between *integrators* and the *subjects-to-be-integrated*.

The present study relies on a genealogical analysis of discourse as a methodological tool (Carabine, 2001; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1984; Hook, 2007). It draws from a dataset that encompasses official policy documents addressing the issue of immigrant integration released by EU institutions. In the area of integration policy, this includes chiefly the European Commission (EC) (especially through its Directorate-General on Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)), and to a lesser degree, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament (EP). In addition, the data includes a number of press statements by EU officials, minutes of meetings where the issue of integration is discussed, as well as documents related to funding schemes targeting integration (policy-relevant) research.

3. The Europeanization of integration policy

Aside from shaping the research agenda measuring immigrant integration, the EU co-produces knowledge on integration by a) politicizing diversity management, i.e. creating mobility and diversity as political problems, b) normalizing integrationism as a political goal, i.e. contributing to strengthening integrationism as a hegemonic mode of dealing with mobility-related diversity and c) shaping the public debate, i.e. setting the terms for how diversity should be seen and discussed. The methods through which EU institutions achieve this – in addition to the financial impetus discussed above – include policy-making, legislation and public outreach (campaigning). Key actors in this respect are the Council, the European Parliament (EP) and, especially, the European Commission (EC), where the Directorate-General on Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) has a central role in integration policy-making and implementation oversight. The European Commission has a special role notably in the process of politicization and normalization of integration, due to its position as an official agenda-setting power mandated to carry out

initiatives in certain policy fields. The EC, in fact, has a duty to guard the interests of the Union and cannot be partial to national interest. In addition, the appointment of commissioners is not subject to a popular vote, which leaves the EC relatively free of political pressure in pursuing agendas that are not necessarily salient or popular across member states.

For many decades since the founding Treaty of Rome (1958), European nation-states were reluctant to cede control over matters of border control, national membership and the rights of non-citizens. Although earlier (largely non-binding) intergovernmental directives provided guidance with respect to non-citizens and their rights and obligations,² it wasn't until the 1990s that the governance of mobility and diversity was formally "Europeanized" (c.f. Block & Bonjour, 2013; Favell, 2001a; Rosenow, 2009). The creation of the pillar "Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)" in the Maastricht Treaty (1992) paved the way for intergovernmental cooperation in migration issues. Immigration and asylum, hitherto being under the exclusive authority of nation-states, formally became subject to supranational intervention at the 1996-97 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in Amsterdam. A newly consolidating European Union sought to influence national decision-making in the face of pressing security issues in a politically unstable world, as the neighbouring Balkan war was forcing refugees to flee towards Western Europe and there was an increased movement across borders from newly open post-communist countries. Member states saw mutual advantage in joining forces to deal with these new circumstances, which they saw as an opportunity to strengthen capacity for security measures, as well as an opportunity to circumvent national constraints on migration control and to avoid judicial scrutiny in cases infringing on rights and liberties (Guiraudon, 2000). Yet, this was nonetheless a turning point as it posed a key challenge to national sovereignty and to state control over political membership and participation.³

Upon signing the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam and the drafting of the Tampere Programme the same year, national legislation targeting immigrants officially became a new policy field at the EU level, as immigration and integration moved towards the top of the EU policy agenda. At the European summit in Tampere 1999, "integration" of third country nationals (TCNs) – as the principal targets of EU integration policies are called – was framed as granting them comparable rights to EU citizens. This rights-based approach was to transform in subsequent years, but at the time it was in line with the four common goals related to migration and integration established in Tampere: partnership with countries of origin; a common European asylum policy; fair treatment of TCNs; and the management of migration flows. It was also in line with the agendas of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)⁴ that lobbied in favor of securing the rights of non-citizens and took an

² This includes, for instance, the 1977 (1983) European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers (ETS No. 093) and the 1992 Convention on the participation of foreigners in public life at the local level (ETS 144), as well as the numerous conferences of European Ministers responsible for Migration Affairs since 1980. The Council of Europe – an intergovernmental body that is not an EU institution – was a pioneer in advancing the integrationist agenda to a supranational level, notably with respect to the rights of non-citizens.

³ It should be noted that member states continue to resist EU efforts to supranationalize the governance of mobility and diversity, especially when it comes to giving non-citizens more rights. The failed implementation of the Single Permit and the Blue Card initiatives is one example. EU-mandated integration policy is likewise unequally embraced and implemented across member states.

⁴ Such NGOs included, for instance, the Starting Line Group, the Organisation European Citizenship Action Service, the European Union Migrants' Forum, the Churches' Committee for Migrants in Europe, as well as Migration Policy Group, which continues to exert a prominent role in this sphere, not least by administrating the Commission's

active role in the process of harmonizing integration policies at EU level (c.f. Geddes, 2000; Rosenow, 2009).

However, controlling migration and managing asylum proved to be more pressing matters than integration at the time, and it wasn't until 2003 that the first coherent policy instrument – Communication on immigration, integration and employment – was issued by the Commission to address that particular issue. It advocated a “holistic approach” to integration, that was by now no longer about increasing the rights of TCNs. Instead it was understood to be “both a matter of social cohesion and a pre-requisite for economic efficiency” (p. 17). The 2004 Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy confirmed the integration of TCNs as an area of mutual concern whose significance goes beyond national borders, as “the failure of an individual Member State to develop and implement a successful integration policy for migrants can have in different ways adverse implications for other Member States”.⁵

Since the signature of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, European institutions have been mandated to “provide incentives and support for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals”.⁶ It was in this decade that we witnessed not only a full-blown Europeanization of integration policy, but also the politicization of “integration”, i.e. the construction of diversity management as a political problem.

The decade to follow saw the adoption of two major policies, the 2011 European Agenda for the Integration of TCNs and the 2016 Action Plan on Integration, as well as the initiating of major funding schemes intended to support EU's goals to introduce and support integration measures in the member states. Already in 2002 the Commission experimented with pilot funding projects (the INTI initiatives), which demonstrated EU's intention to seriously tackle the integration of immigrants. But the first major scheme was the Integration Fund established in the 2005.⁷ The idea was launched at an interministerial conference on integration during the Dutch Presidency of the Council of EU. The Netherlands was a leader in pushing forward the integrationist agenda and much of EU-level policy in this field is built on the Dutch model. For instance, the Netherlands successfully pushed pre-departure integration measures to be part of the eligible actions funded under the European Integration Fund, established by the Council in 2007. As we will discuss below, this was a significant step towards formulating integration measures to serve as migration control.

The EU defines integration as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents”.⁸ Such vague and overly broad definition certainly leaves room for interpretation. Like other terms that are easily recognizable but have no fixed or agreed upon meaning, *integration* is a floating signifier, not unlike words such as *community*, *development*, or indeed, *race* (c.f. Hall, 2021). The only way to know what the interlocutor means when using this

European Website for integration. Another important representative of the civil society is the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), an advisory body to the Council, Commission and Parliament.

⁵ *Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy*, Council of the European Union, 2004.

⁶ European Website on Integration, EC. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/eu-grid/eu-strategy_en

⁷ *Framework programme on Solidarity and the Management of Migration Flows for the period 2007-2013*, EC, 2005.

⁸ *Common Basic Principles*, 2004.

term is to look at the indicators, or parameters they use when they theorize, evaluate, measure, or legislate this phenomenon. Not unlike scholarly research, EU institutions also speak of “social, civic and cultural integration”.⁹ For the European Council, integration measures should be based on a “balance between migrants’ rights [...] and duties” (European Pact for Integration and Asylum, 2008). But throughout the past two decades, the weight shifted from the former to the latter, as concerns with the social status and notably gainful employment of migrants that predominated in earlier documents were joined by more securitarian and identitarian concerns in more recent discourse. These shifts are subject of discussion in the following section.

4. Competing strategies and shifts across time in EU integrationism

Throughout Western Europe, a shift toward a discourse of assimilation in policy, politics, and public debate has been noted to have taken place in the 1990s. Brubaker (2001) argues that the strict assimilationism that was typical until the 1970s, was replaced by a pro-multicultural differentialist discourse open towards embracing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in the period 1970-1990s. This “open” period not only coincides with the rise of neoliberalism and the related process of globalization, but is a result of the neoliberal need to keep resources – including labor force – fluid and consumer culture totalizing, i.e. globalized. However, since the late 1990s, Brubaker notes an increased return of assimilationist discourse, which he interprets as different from the earlier one, in being more nuanced and hence more “defensible”. Of course, this is also the period in which nationhood experienced a revival following its suppression under communism, while the kind of internationalism with civilizational stakes that the Cold War depended on lost its *raison d’être*.

If we accept this reading of the historical shifts in the debates on diversity, then it would be sensible to argue that another shift occurred in the 2010s, when the importance of a cohesive nation returned with full steam and questions of identity and belonging took hold over integration debates in a less “defensible” manner. This was the decade when European leaders proclaimed multiculturalism a “failure” and a pro-assimilationist discourse became normalized. For Angela Merkel, then German Chancellor, “multiculturalism” did not mean simply the coexistence of multiple cultures in the same country, but rather “allowing people of different cultural backgrounds to live side by side *without integrating*” (Siebold, 2010, emphasis added). Therefore, “integration” was understood as the polar opposite of “multiculturalism”. Cultural diversity, for a time embraced as a virtue across the Global North, slowly transformed back into a threat. This renewed “assimilationism”, as Brubaker calls it, is a result of the successful amalgamation of neoliberal strategies of power with securitarian and identitarian agendas (focusing on national, ethnic, and racial axis of differentiation) in such a way so as to result in a reconceptualization of the boundaries of national membership into a new stratified system of b/ordering. In this system, as in previous ones, some are welcome, whereas others are rejected, surveilled, pushed back and imprisoned. What is new about it is the parameters of stratification between desirable and undesirable foreigners, or their unique combination: a subject’s utility and productivity potential combined with their membership in desirable ethno-racial groups, in addition to “birthright lottery” determine their chances before

⁹ *Framework Programme on Solidarity*, 2005.

Europe's b/ordering system. It is a coronation of the intersectional power of race and class over the livelihoods of non-citizens.

It is against this background that we should interpret the ruptures and continuities in the integrationist discourses advanced by the EU as a new actor in this policy field, as it resisted these wider trends at certain instances, and embraced them – sometimes by taking a leading role – at others. There are four wider discourses that jointly shape EU's discourse on integration. Although some of them dominate in one historical period, while receding in others, there is no clear linear development at play. Neoliberalization, the commitment to human rights and social justice, concerns with national security and the preservation of a manageably homogenous community increasingly defined across racial lines are all competing overall strategies that influence EU-level integration policy to some extent.

4.1 *Neoliberal strategy*

Following the failure of the “welfare state”, neoliberalism has been the main general strategy of population management in the European Union. As a political philosophy, neoliberalism pertains to the organization of the economic sphere, often associated with Thatcher's and Reagan's *laissez-faire* policies of the 1970s and 1980s, including deregulation, privatization, free trade, austerity, and the shrinking of the public services sector. Yet, far from being just an economic programme, neoliberalism affects political and social reality to the extent that it “aspires to be a complete way of life and a holistic worldview, in a way that previous models of capitalism did not” (Kotsko, 2020, p. 8). Globally, the widening of the wealth gap, global inequality, consumerism, extractionist imperialism, climate change, technological hyper-advancement, and globalization are all commonly understood as effects of the ubiquitous embrace of neoliberal reforms in rich countries among both the right and the left since the early 1990s. For the present purposes, neoliberalism is best understood through the lens of governmentality (Foucault, 1991). This term seeks to capture “the conduct of conduct” (Foucault, 1991), or the ways political (and not only state) power is established and exercised and how populations are (self)regulated through various institutions and technologies of power. Therefore, neoliberalism refers to the emergence of institutions and practices that facilitate and encourage individual and group conformity to market norms. Importantly, governmentality affects a wide spectrum of power encompassing both coercion and consent, i.e. ranging from the governing of others in all aspects of life to the governing of the self. Self-regulation, in turn, is the central demand of neoliberal governmentality.

In Europe, EU institutions have been at the forefront of endorsing neoliberal restructuring in many areas beyond the economy, from education (Mitchell, 2006) to social innovation policy (Fougère et al., 2017) to gender politics (Young, 2000). The EU enlargement in 2004 is itself seen as an effect of neoliberal power by some scholars (e.g., Mitchell, 2006), because it increased opportunities for labor exploitation, made economically weaker member states dependent on import, and depressed wages. Such works have analyzed the European integration process primarily as a “disciplinary neoliberal” system of governance (c.f. Young, 2000). Neoliberal trends have continued even after the financial meltdown in 2008, widely blamed on neoliberal policies.

Like many other aspects of social life, the integrationist political programme of the European Union is fundamentally shaped to fit primarily a neoliberal form of governmentality. Hence,

neoliberal logic continues to guide EU's interventions related to immigrant integration, even if it is recently being challenged by more culturist arguments. The neoliberalization of citizenship – one of the outcomes of integrationist strategies – has been a case in point drawing significant attention among scholars. Van Houdt et al (2011) demonstrate how citizenship has been reinvented in Western Europe in the past several decades by means of combining a renewed sacralization of the nation and a commodification of citizenship as a prize one needs to earn through individual effort. Other concepts, like domopolitics (Walters, 2004) and deservingness, likewise seek to grasp the neoliberalization of citizenship. Another example is the neoliberalization of migration control. The EU was at the forefront of “mainstreaming” transnational mobility for the privileged classes of high-salaried cosmopolitans, “knowledge workers” and businesspersons. This was done not only infrastructurally by creating a borderless labor market within the EU, but also by mandating and incentivizing states to lower the entry barriers for elite migrants, as well as creating funding schemes conditional upon staff mobility (including the Horizon programme).

The foundational role of the neoliberal strategy in EU's management of mobility and diversity is evident at both macro and micro levels. This corresponds to two levels of operation of neoliberal integrationism: the management of non-citizens for capital accumulation and their disciplining as productive subjects.

4.1.1 The biopolitics of capital accumulation

At macro level, EU is invested in the management of the participation of non-citizens in Europe's capital accumulation system, and as such, this is clearly a realm of biopolitics. For quite some time since the beginning of EU institutions' involvement in the governmentality of migration and diversity, so-called “labor integration” was the principal rationale for promoting integration policies. Social justice goals, such as non-discrimination and equality often co-feature in the text of policy documents, but specific measures stemming from those policies were nearly entirely focused on increasing employment among non-citizens. In this respect, the early integrationist agenda of EU institutions was fully subsumed under the general neoliberal aim, affirmed in the 2000 Lisbon Strategy, to make the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”. The strategy for management of the immigrant population was, therefore, geared primarily towards maximizing the “contribution [immigrants] could make to the Lisbon objectives”¹⁰ and exploiting immigration “as a means of ensuring that high levels of employment and productivity can be maintained in future decades”.¹¹ Non-citizens were, therefore, primarily regarded as resources for economic growth, as well as for mitigating demographic decline. In this manifestation of biopower, that combines biopolitical goals to ensure longevity with the extractionist logic of capital accumulation, migrants are employed as a *replacement strategy* for uninterrupted and continuously growing market economy:

While immigration in itself is not a solution to demographic ageing, more sustained immigration flows could increasingly be required to meet the needs of the EU labour market and ensure Europe's prosperity.¹²

¹⁰ *Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment*, EC, 2003, p. 4.

¹¹ *Choosing to grow: Knowledge, innovation and jobs in a cohesive society* - Report to the Spring European Council, 21 March 2003 on the Lisbon strategy of economic, social and environmental renewal, EC, 2003

¹² *Framework programme on Solidarity*, 2005.

Hence, the dominant language in early documents constructs integration as an “opportunity” that ensures TCNs have a “positive fiscal net contribution”¹³ that “can boost GDP”¹⁴ and “increase entrepreneurship”.¹⁵ Even concerns with gender perspectives do not aim primarily to ensure the full emancipation and equality between (immigrant) women and men, but rather to “to fully utilise the potential of immigrant women in the labour market”.¹⁶

However, the management of the economy is not the only macro-level area where EU’s neoliberal integrationism operates. Increasingly, it is becoming incorporated in the palette of technologies of border management, migration control and the neoliberalization of citizenship, that brought about new axis of human classification. The neoliberalization of economic and social life was a crucial mediator in the process of developing a new stratified system of b/ordering. Borders – both territorial and symbolic – are no longer generally strict as in the period until the 1970s, nor generally loose as in the two decades that followed. Borders are now managed in a differentiated manner, guided by the principle of selectivity: they grow more open to one segment, while simultaneously becoming more restrictive to other segments (c.f. Haas et al., 2018). These are borders governed by a logic of merit, deservingness and utility, where those considered an economic asset (high skilled migrants, entrepreneurs and investors) have the door wide open, while for others (low skilled migrants, family migrants, asylum seekers) opportunities for access grow narrower, as they experience the border concentrically expanding both inwards and outwards from the traditional sovereign territory. In this extractive logic, migrants are commodified as a resource on which to capitalize. However, the passport privilege remains a mediator in this system, regulating who has access to proving their utility in the first place. Other pre-screening methods of differentiation likewise ensure the ongoing relevance of racial systems of differentiation, including the racialized exploitation of cheap labor, growing restrictiveness of asylum reception (the majority of which stem from the post-colonial non-white Global South), as well as the rising role of pre-arrival integration measures that serve to filter out “unassimilable” applicants before they even cross the border. The EU had a crucial role to play in enabling and legitimizing member states especially with respect to the shift in the discourse on asylum and with pre-integration measures. Such techniques of power, therefore, coexist with the neoliberalization of diversity management, and we will return to these further in the text.

4.1.2 The disciplining of the productive subject

At micro level, the neoliberal strategy shapes integrationist policies by seeking to shape the behavior of subjects, i.e. to discipline them. The current system of b/ordering gave birth to a new type of individuality that is now a basis for exclusion (both in terms of access to migration pathways and to political membership). This new subjectivity presupposes responsible, self-sufficient, industrious, self-regulated and self-disciplined individuals. One must now excel in personal achievements in order to gain access not only to EU territory, but also to EU membership (i.e. become naturalized). “Attracting talents”, “the best and the brightest”, and “brain gain” are

¹³ *Action Plan on the Integration of Third-country nationals: Factsheet*, EC, DG HOME, 2016. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/document/download/551a0fe4-7c6e-4d9d-956e-40d25693e533_en.

¹⁴ *Action Plan on the Integration of TCNs*, 2016.

¹⁵ *Choosing to grow*, 2003.

¹⁶ *A Common Agenda for Integration*, EC, 2005, p.3.

just a few ways to capture the desirable newcomer. If one has no skills to demonstrate, heavy investment potential (for instance, in so called “golden visa” schemes) can replace this requirement, ensuring that the world’s rich retain an unobstructed access to the rich world. Especially since the introduction of so-called pre-arrival integration measures across member states (that the EU enabled), it is no longer sufficient to have a family member in Europe in order to gain the right to join them. Individual behavior is, thus, increasingly competing with fundamental rights to determine access to immigration, settlement, permanent residence and EU citizenship.

4.2 Equality and social justice strategy

It is important to note that neoliberal governmentality remains contested in the EU and coexists in an uneasy tension with other accumulation regimes, most notably the social democratic project of the Keynesian era (Mitchell, 2006). In integration policy, the “welfarist” concerns are most evident in EU’s support for redistribution programs and social funds for refugees, migrants and other vulnerable populations. Such measures are usually paired with a discourse surrounding the access to rights and equality of opportunity of non-citizens. But as Young (2000) demonstrates with respect to “gender mainstreaming” in employment policies, EU-level measures on equal opportunity readily fit into the pro-market-forming activities of neoliberal governmentality.

The rights-based approach to integration dominated notably the early Europeanization of integration policy, but still remains important part of the register from which integrationist discourses draw legitimacy. It stems from the self-promotion of the European Union as a defender of human rights and promotor of equality, the embeddedness of the protection of rights and freedoms in its founding treaties and international conventions, as well as the lobbying on the part of NGOs who seek to advance the rights of non-citizens. In the first coherent policy document since the EU gained competence over justice and home affairs policies following the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the EC describes “integration” as a way “to improve the situation of third country nationals [by] assimilating their rights with those of citizens”, as well as “combating racial discrimination and all forms of racism and xenophobia”.¹⁷ According to Rosenow (2009), at the time the EC sought to advance a more liberal approach to migration and diversity to balance the restrictive and securitarian approach of nation-states. As a reminder, this was a time when cosmopolitan, postnational and multicultural agendas were in vogue in the Global North. A decade later, when the EU has already been established as a key player in the agenda on management of mobility and diversity, neoliberal goals will become the most important factor shaping integration policy. However, the equality and social justice discourse will remain embedded in integration policies. For example, the 2005 Common Agenda for Integration, revolved around two central themes: labor market integration and ensuring migrants have “equal opportunities” as citizens, treating migrant (“TCNs”) on par with “ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups”.

¹⁷ *Communication on Immigration and Asylum Policies*, Commission of the European Communities, 1994, foreword.

Securitarian strategy

It was in relation to security that EU member states first started to cooperate in the realm of immigration regulation. Security concerns were the “lowest common denominator” that led states to compromise on giving up some of the sovereignty they enjoy with respect to managing non-citizens, and security cooperation indeed paved the way for harmonization of integration policies (Geddes, 2008). Security and integration were seen as related problematics already in the early 2000s, with the EC finding that “wide-spread concerns relating to security and the need for greater social cohesion have already led to renewed debate on the strategies needed to ensure the integration of migrants.”¹⁸

However, it was in the past decade that security was explicitly constructed as the rationale behind integration measures. The latest Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2020) dedicates a significant amount to explaining how “a more cohesive and inclusive society for all can help prevent the spread of all forms of extremist ideologies that can lead to terrorism and violent extremism”.¹⁹ This sort of issues were hardly ever the subject of earlier integration policy documents. For the most part, the securitization of integration policy is not necessarily identifiable at the level of discourse, as strategic documents on integration policy (save the 2020 Action Plan) tend to refrain from openly presenting integration as a security issue. This link has been more apparent at the level of practices, by joining not only migration management, but also integration management with the policy area of security, defense and anti-terrorism.

For instance, the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) is a key EC body that is jointly responsible for migration and integration-related affairs *and* for internal security. DG HOME simultaneously manages the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Internal Security Fund, and the Border Management and Visa Instrument. It is under the political leadership of the Commissioner for Home Affairs, whose two sole areas of responsibility are, again, migration and internal security. Thus, issues as diverse as external borders, immigration control, immigrant integration, asylum management, human smuggling, law enforcement cooperation, and fighting terrorism are all bundled together under the same policy area. This is important to the extent that it constructs not only immigration control but also diversity management as a question not of rights, equality and justice, nor of economic development, as in policy documents, but of security and order. Thus, while at the level of discourse, “developing welcoming, diverse and inclusive societies”²⁰ is a strategic goal of the EU, at the level of practice, diversity is managed as a security threat.

This is also the case with the controversial general objective of the EC under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen to “promote our European way of life”, whose main headings are “strong borders, a fresh start on migration and internal security”.²¹ The creation of this portfolio represents a formal acknowledgement of the merging of the security agenda with the migration and diversity agenda, and an official move away from a rights-based integrationism to a securitarian

¹⁸ *Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment*, EC, 2003, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*, EC, 2020, p. 6.

²⁰ *Action Plan for Integration*, 2016.

²¹ *Strategic Plan for 2020-2024*, DG HOME, EC, 2020.

integrationism. It also signifies EU's silent complicity with the scapegoating of European Muslims and their racialization as dangerous, backwards, and culturally incompatible, despite remaining careful not to name Muslims directly.

4.3 Nativist-communitarian strategy

Along with neoliberalism, scholars (e.g., Etzioni, 2007) have identified another main strategy of population management in contemporary Europe: communitarianism. A communitarian approach is concerned with building and maintaining a community through common values and depends on the commitment of individuals to defend those values. Since its inception, the EU has sought to find a common denominator beyond national idiosyncrasies by way of promoting the embrace of "European values", such as the upholding the rule of law, respect of individual freedoms, protecting human rights, preserving democracy, and ensuring equality before the law. Communitarianism can, in fact, be regarded as a key source of legitimacy for a supranational organization such as the EU that seeks to supersede the nation-state as the container of political decision-making.

However, as nationalist ideals have reassumed their old glory throughout Europe following the end of the Cold War, EU's communitarian programme has steadily grew more and more intertwined with culturist and nativist concerns. This has become evident since the onset of the anti-terrorist agenda, and was particularly inflamed by subsequent crises, notably the 2008 economic meltdown, the refugee crisis, and Britain's exit from the EU. The rise in prominence of right-wing and far right political parties and movements resulted in their greater influence over shaping the political agendas both at national and, more tentatively, EU level. The purely communitarian – or rather neoliberal-communitarian (as per van Houdt et al., 2011) – programme that predominated in a newly consolidating European Union at the turn of the twenty-first century has given way to more nativist and culturist concerns. Interestingly, the EU has managed to successfully pair this type of communitarianism with neoliberal strategies, despite the apparent contradiction between the two, resulting in a technique of governing through both community and individual responsibility (van Houdt et al., 2011).

Joppke (2021) offers a good term for this kind of statist nationalism that the European Union fully ascribes to: "neoliberal nationalism". Unlike "regular" nationalism, neoliberal nationalism is nonethnic, or rather not necessarily ethnic, but it remains exclusive of those perceived as not contributing. However, I find it is useful to retain the term "communitarianism", because it continues to remain a strong guiding principle at EU level. It is necessary, however, to add the qualifier "nativist" in order to capture this move in the reverse direction, from civic to nativist and nationalist discourse. Nativist communitarianism means that the "community" remains a central concern of population management, but its defining parameters have become increasingly intertwined with nationalist ideology and the essentialist worldview it carries along.

As we saw earlier, the early and predominantly neoliberal discourse on immigrant integration was only vaguely interested in questions of "social cohesion" and "European values" and hardly at all in questions of cultural differences and identity. It is true that already in early documents adherence to values was outlined as an obligation on the part of immigrants. Already in 2005, integration policy included measures to enable TCNs "to adapt to the society of the Member State in socio-

cultural terms, and to share the values enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”²². Similarly, the 2008 European Pact on Migration and Asylum states that “language learning and access to employment are essential factors for integration”, but that migrants must respect “the identities of Member States and the EU”, as well as their “fundamental values, such as human rights, freedom of opinion, democracy, tolerance, equality between men and women, and the compulsory schooling of children” (Article I, g).

But as we shall see, there is a stark rupture between the early integrationist strategy of the EU and the current one. Three key transformations characterize this rising importance of the nativist-communitarian political agenda in shaping EU-level integrationism. The first sees “European values” moving from the juridical sphere of constitutional rights and freedoms, towards cultural values springing from Judeo-Christian liberal tradition. The second transformation refers to how adherence to liberal values (and not employment, educational attainment, urban segregation, etc.) became a primary proxy for integration as well as for immigration restriction. As a result, the EU adopted the discourse, already dominant in countries like the Netherlands and Germany, that frames “integration” as a wager in some kind of a civilizational clash between the liberal and the “illiberal” world, and thus joined in the public scapegoating of European Muslims as the embodiment of illiberal values. Finally, the third change saw the subject of integration policies transformed to include groups previously not considered integrable bodies.

4.3.1 “Protecting a European Way of Life”

The EU is, in this respect, not an isolated case, as it followed other social and political transformations in the past three decades and, in fact, it was among the last power holders in Europe to succumb to a nativist rhetoric and a rejection of multiculturalism. But alas, with the appointment of the current Commission under President Ursula von den Leyen,²³ the EU fully embraced this nativist communitarianism, albeit not without internal conflict.

Even before she formally took office, von den Leyen immediately caused controversy by replacing the office for migration, home affairs, and citizenship with a new portfolio for Vice President Margaritis Schinas, titled “Protecting a European Way of Life”. This move caused an uproar not only among the knowledgeable public but within EU institutions as well. For instance, the leader of the Liberal bloc in the EP, Guy Verhofstadt, said the EC “should stay far away from [Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor] Orban’s rhetoric”.²⁴ Sophie in ‘t Veld, a Dutch liberal MEP, claimed that “the implication that Europeans need to be protected from external cultures is grotesque and this narrative should be rejected” (Rankin, 2019). The reactions were so divided that, following a formal complaint from the EP initiated by left, green and social-democrat MEPs, the EC eventually substituted “protecting” with “promoting” to soften the tone. This seemed to appease critics within

²² *Framework programme on Solidarity*, 2005.

²³ Von den Leyen – a descendant of early settlers in the Americas, large plantation and slave-owners in the American South and German nobility – is the first woman president of the EC and a member of the conservative European People’s Party in the EP. Interestingly, as a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Germany, she built her political career not on a nativist rhetoric, but on the contrary, by pushing – at the dismay of her party’s conservative wing – towards a neoliberal approach to migration management of easing the migration routes for high-skilled migrants.

²⁴ Guy Verhofstadt’s Twitter (@guyverhofstadt), 2019, September 11. Link: <https://twitter.com/guyverhofstadt/status/1171697748002955264>

the EP, who apparently only saw a problem with the word “protecting” and its far-right connotation, but did not raise objections in relation to the assumption of a bounded and clear-cut “European way of life”.

The EC defended their discourse on “European way of life”, claiming that it referred to the liberal values upon which the EU is founded, citing Article 2 of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.²⁵

This defense, however, rings hollow for the simple fact that it doesn’t answer why the need to protect “European values” is framed in the context of migration. Other internal political developments pose more serious and less debatable threat to Article 2, especially the rise of the far right and the existence of illiberal governments like Hungary within the EU itself. This discourse, therefore, implies that migrants are somehow threatening “European values” and that these are irreconcilable with non-European values that migrants bring with them. A more honest and more revealing definition of what the protection of European values really means is given by the leader of EPP Manfred Webber, who apparently coined the controversial phrase (Matamoros, 2019). For him, these values “come from our history, from Judeo-Christian values, but also from the philosophical tradition and the great thinkers of the Enlightenment. They make the European Way of Life so different from the rest of the world”.²⁶ This affirmation of Europe as white, Christian, exceptional and superior to the rest of the world is closer to the implications of EC’s rebranding than the referral to the Lisbon treaty.

4.3.2 Integration 2.0 and the new integrable body

The restructuring of EU-level migration and integration policy under the current presidency of the EC brought about more than just an appeal to far-right rhetoric that identifies Europe as white and Christian, and constructs it as threatened by migration from the Middle East and Africa. Two key ruptures can be identified with respect to the thus far relatively stable stance on integration: a redefinition of how “integration” is imagined with a change in emphasis of more nativist-communitarian elements over others; and the reinvention of the subject-to-be-integrated.

First, throughout the decades, “integration” itself was re-defined, and not only by openly merging it with security policy, as we discussed above. The emphasis on which elements make up immigrant integration endured a shift across the years from a neoliberal/rights-based approach to a securitarian/nativist-communitarian one. This does not mean that neoliberal strategies of power or EU’s commitment to the protection of fundamental rights have vanished from the picture. On the contrary, they still form an important part of the rationale and legitimacy behind promoting integrationism. The emphasis, however, has changed, from framing integration in the context of a welcoming Europe that “responds to the needs of TCNs” for their contribution in filling in labor shortages,²⁷ to posing it as a question of “ensuring our communities are cohesive and close-knit”

²⁵ An EC spokesperson for Euronews (Matamoros, 2019).

²⁶ An EPP spokesperson for Euronews (Matamoros, 2019).

²⁷ *Common Basic Principles*, 2004.

and European values are protected.²⁸ The early integrationist discourse left little room for speaking of protecting “European values” in the face of immigration. Nearly three decades later, the conditions of possibility have been created to allow for a normalized, if deeply contested, use of allusions to kinship borrowed from nationalist myths of origin.

The second shift in EU integrationism brought about by the appointment of von den Leyen as President of the EC has to do with the target of integration policy. Until 2020, the subjects of integration policy for EU institutions were exclusively “third country nationals” (TCNs). These are rather narrowly defined as residents of EU member states with a non-EU citizenship. While the terms “migrants” and “immigrants” are used frequently in earlier policy documents, TCNs has thus far been the binding term and the only one that’s used in the official titles. The term “migrants”, therefore, never encompassed intra-EU migration, nor naturalized citizens and their children. However, the 2020 Action Plan brought about a major novelty in the definition of the integrable subject by including, in addition to TCNs, “EU citizens of migrant background”. This category of people is defined as:

nationals of EU Member States who had a third-country nationality and became EU citizens through naturalisation in one of the EU Member States as well as EU citizens who have a third country migrant background through their foreign-born parents.²⁹

The EC doesn’t dwell too much on explaining why it was thought necessary to widen the scope of this integration agenda. With or without a “migration background”, EU citizens have access to rights that far exceed those of non-citizens. The 2020 Action Plan is careful to include a footnote in this respect, saying that these new integrable subjects “cannot be subject to the fulfilment of integration conditions in order to access their rights linked to EU citizenship”, including rights of entry and residence. The EC finds it necessary to emphasize this precisely because, as was argued earlier, a number of integration measures promoted by the EU and implemented at national level (e.g., pre-departure measures, integration tests and citizenship tests) effectively act as migration control.

For a long time the EU integrationist discourses resisted the trend in scholarship to identify naturalized persons and the children of non-citizen migrants as the subjects in need of integration. In research these two groups are usually called “people with migration background” and “second generation immigrants”, respectively. While the 2020 Action Plan resists the usage of the latter, it does seem to appear that the explosion in integration measurement in research that was witnessed in the last decade has had some effect in shaping the political discourse in EU institutions. The inclusion of EU citizens as subjects of integration policy has important implications. Chief among them is the creation of a hierarchy of European citizenship. It implicates that even naturalized citizens or citizens born and bred in the host country cannot be considered to belong because they are seen as members of *a priori* defined problematic groups. These are groups that are seen to carry a cultural “baggage” that doesn’t seem to wane over generations. Knowing that discourses on “alien culture” are nowadays imbricated with racialized meanings, it is most worrying that the EU embraced this trend. Another implication is that the subject of EU population management in

²⁸ Mission letter from the President Ursula von der Leyen to Vice President Margaritis Schinas, 2019.

²⁹ *Action Plan on Integration*, 2020, p. 1.

integration policies is now fully “migranticized” (as per Dahinden, 2016), as the qualifier for integrable subjects is no longer their absence of EU citizenship, but their presence of “migration background”. It is worth considering whether the proliferation of research on immigrants and the institutionalization of “migration studies” as a field in its own right had some effect on this new discourse adopted by the EC.

Conclusion

Since the 2000s, the European Union has been enacting a key influence on the proliferation of integration policies in member states. This has been largely done through adopting non-binding but agenda-setting policy instruments and initiatives, such as the Common Basic Principles on Migrant Integration, the European Integration Fund, the European Website on Integration and Handbooks on Integration. In addition, several binding directives have been adopted that address the issue of integration of immigrants, notably the directives on Family Reunification and Long-term Residence. These instruments have been leading the way in conceptualizing diversity management on national level. They have been instrumental in advancing the idea that immigrant integration is a major benefit to society because it strengthens cohesion and national unity, prevents social conflict (e.g., radicalization), boosts economic development, and saves on public costs, and in encouraging states to take measures in this direction. They have also been influential in reconceptualizing integration from within a securitizing agenda, as a tool to prevent not only internal social conflict, but “imported” threats such as Islamist radicalization.

To sum up the points made in this paper, several political strategies from which integrationism draws legitimacy and purpose coexist in the integrationist agenda of the European Union since the early intervention of EU institutions in national-level integration policy. These agendas are diverse and sometimes mutually opposing, which reflects the various interests invested in the EU as a union of nation-states, each with its own priorities and political programs. The complexity is increased due to the leading role the EC has taken in shaping the integrationist agenda, and the fact that it remains the most independent among the three EU legislating institutions from direct national pressures.

Although a clear linear development cannot be identified, there are certain patterns that delineate which strategies dominated over others in different contexts and historical periods. As was discussed earlier, three decades ago “integration” meant granting TCNs rights comparable to those of EU citizens and was derived from EU’s commitment to the protection of fundamental rights, equality of opportunity and non-discrimination. The 2000s saw an increased emphasis on the active participation of TCNs and their contribution notably to the economy, which paved the way for discourses on “earned” rights that presuppose a proactive, independent individual. At present, these agendas are at times overshadowed by concerns with security and preservation of an exclusionary community, implicitly defined in terms of Judeo-Christian values, whiteness and Europe’s exceptionalism. European institutions resisted the adoption of such agendas for a time, but eventually gave in, especially during the current Presidency of the EC. Thus, tentatively we can conclude that while early EU integrationism was dominated by a combination of rights-based and neoliberal discourse, late integrationism saw an increased emphasis on securitarian and nativist-communitarian techniques of diversity management.

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