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Exploring the Current Migration/Integration 'Crisis'

What Bottom-up Solutions?

2016 (PDF)

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The goal of this paper is to analyze the current migration/integration 'crisis' from a bottom-up perspective by considering three different sets of responses:

- (1) public opinion perceptions of crisis;
- (2) narratives and frames proposed by political groups and the media; and
- (3) (good) practices undertaken by local authorities and civil society organizations.

Political and social actors have responded to these ongoing crises in a variety of ways. On one end of the spectrum, we find groups that are highly hostile to immigration and immigrants and reassert the need to protect national identities and values. On the other end, we find groups that look at the crisis from a humanitarian perspective and promote solidarity in line with the idea

that it is the duty of European democracies to comply with international law and protect refugees. Between these narratives we find more or less polarized positions.

We lay out the main aspects and the most recent developments of what we call the 'immigration/integration crisis' in order to understand the roots of the recent conflicts, and find alternative ways to construct a common ground for social and political consensus on these issues. This study also acknowledges that political responses have been slow and have often reinforced the negative perception of the ongoing 'crisis.' Indeed, political leaders from across the political spectrum have often fueled public anxieties around the issue of immigration, thereby contributing to a climate of fear and intolerance.

We argue that discursive constructions of immigrants and ethnic minorities as 'threats' are not helpful if we are to build the basis for cohabitation and viable conflict resolutions. On the contrary, these narratives should be seen as contributing towards the polarization of the European public, the marginalization of migrant communities, and the radicalization of Muslim youth. In particular, these increasingly hostile narratives often hide the key structural causes (such as economic marginalization and systematic discrimination) that have de facto contributed to the 'integration crisis.' Among other things, these types of narratives reinforce the Us/Them distinction and silence immigrants and ethnic minorities, who are considered to be second-class citizens and who are very rarely included in the debates about immigration, integration and terrorism.

We conclude by arguing that actors in the receiving societies - and particularly politicians, the media, local authorities and civil society organizations - should work responsibly towards a more balanced and informed understanding of the current 'crisis.' We argue in favor of strong cooperation among actors in society. To support our approach we offer examples of positive responses to the main conflicting issues raised in this study.

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