

## **The EU's retreat from multiculturalism**

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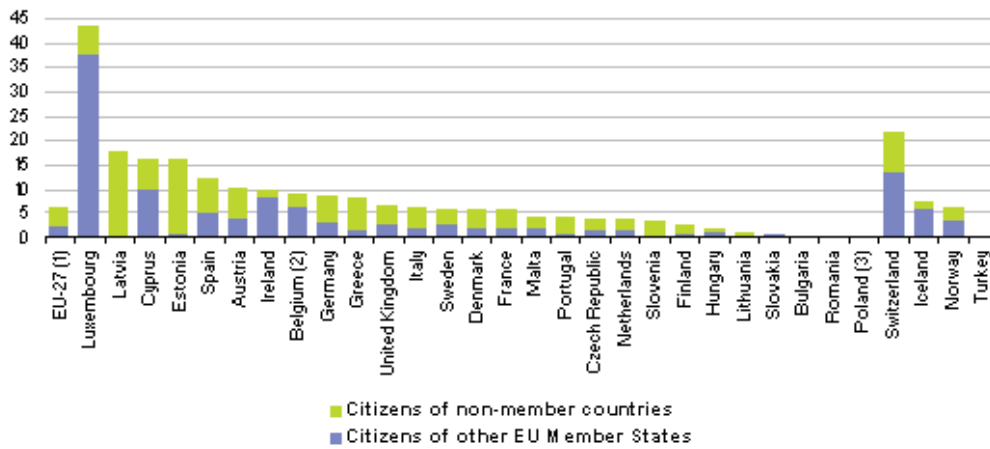
### **Introduction**

The European Union has expanded in recent years, both horizontally (enlargement) and vertically (deepening). It now consists of 27 States, and is implementing the Lisbon Treaty. Further enlargement negotiations are going on with Turkey and other candidate countries – Croatia, Macedonia, Iceland, and Montenegro. A number of instruments cover parts of the EU, such as the Schengen Agreement, the Euro zone, etc. New initiatives such as the External Action service are being implemented. However, the economic crisis of 2008 and the sovereign debt crisis of 2010 have, however, exposed certain weaknesses of economic integration. The battle between those who advocate greater powers for EU institutions and their opponents continues.

Within the EU, persons have moved search of higher wages especially from the newer Eastern member states to the more prosperous Western EU member states. Migrant workers from Turkey, Central and East Europe and the extended neighbourhood of North Africa and the Middle East regions have also entered the EU. The demand for agricultural labour in South Europe has attracted many migrants. The absence of official arrangements for labour movement has resulted in illegal migration and human smuggling. This has resulted in the increase of foreigners in many states and increased the cultural and ethnic diversity of the population. The recent high levels of unemployment and economic slowdown have aggravated xenophobic tendencies, and increased pressures on governments to strengthen restrictions on migration.

### **Increasing diversity in population**

The population in EU members has become more diversified in quantity and composition. According to Eurostat (1), by 2010, the percentage of foreign nationals resident in the EU27 was 6.5%, of which 38 % came from within the EU-27, and a further 23 % from Europe; 15 % from Africa; 13 % from Asia; and 10% from the Americas. The average age of foreign nationals is significantly lower than that of nationals. The percentage of foreign born persons in the EU-27 is 9.4%.



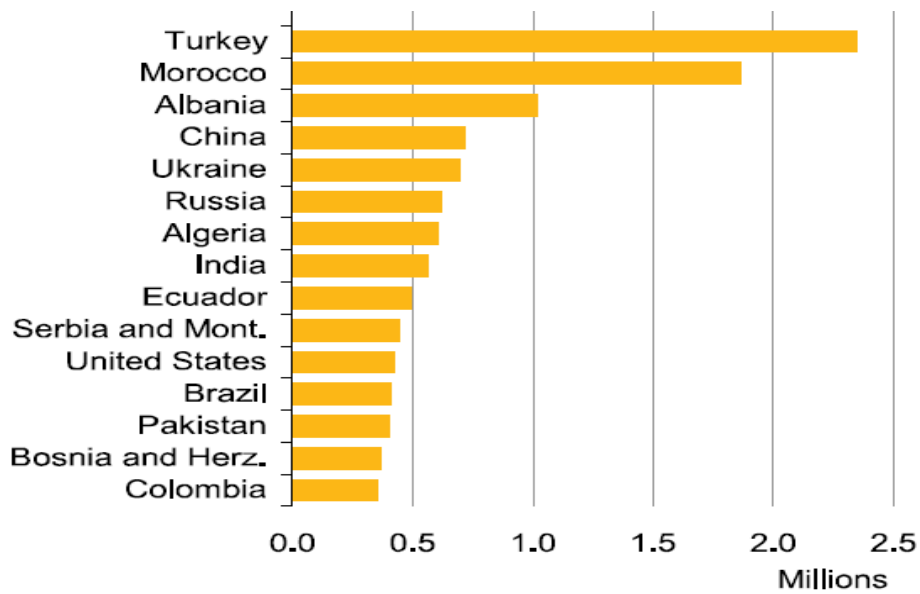
(1) Estimate.  
 (2) 2008.  
 (3) Provisional.  
 Source: Eurostat (migr\_pop1ctz)

**Figure 1. Foreign population in EU-27 states.**

These trends are linked to the integration process and globalization, as people move in search of opportunities outside their countries of normal residence. The movement of persons can enhance the competitiveness receiving countries, while providing benefits for the sending countries. While over 60 % of the migration is within Europe, a significant part comes from Africa and Asia. This is likely to grow in future, as these regions have comparatively young populations.

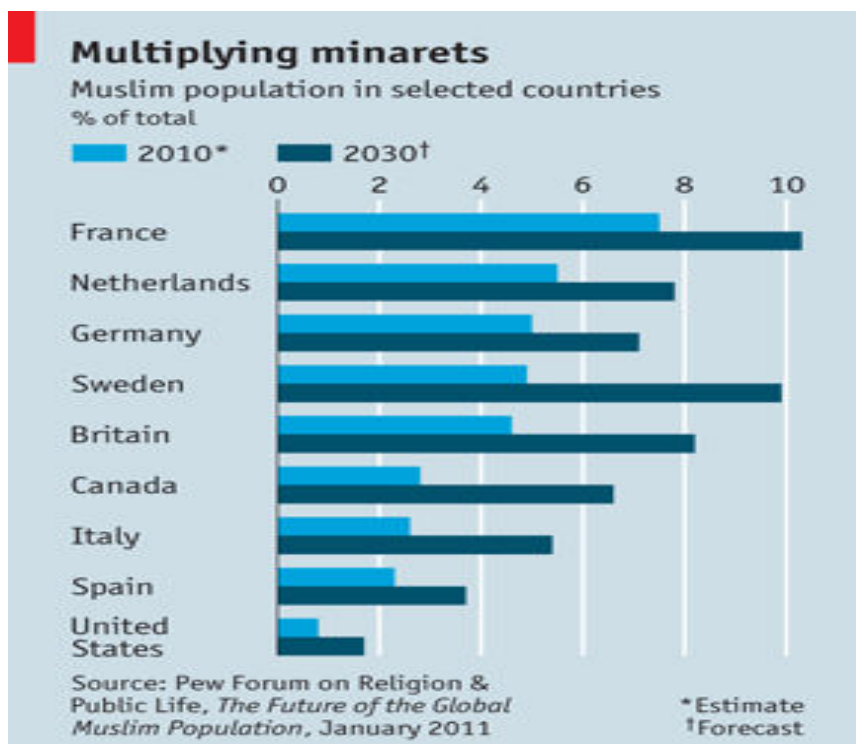
**Socio Economic challenges to EU States**

In several EU states, the rapid increase and visible presence of foreign nationals has led to challenges on the socio-economic front. The recent economic slowdown, including the financial crisis in 2008 and the sovereign debt crisis of 2010-11 have led to further stresses. Closures of firms and job losses have caused rising unemployment across the EU. Nationals and foreigners have both been impacted by the situation.



**Figure 2. Foreigners in the EU from non-EU states**

EU states now have people of widely differing language, culture, religion and ethnic identity living in their midst. The increase has been particularly large in some countries. In the UK the percentage of foreign-born population rose from 6.7% in 1991 to 11.6% in 2010. In France, the percentage of foreign born persons is 8.5 %, with 42% of them coming from Africa. In Spain, the foreign population grew from 0.9% in 1991 to 12.2% by 2011. In Germany, 19 % of the population is of foreign origin, including 8 % foreign nationals. In Greece (2), which once had a very homogenous population, the percentage of foreigners shot up from 1.4% in 1990 to over 10 % by 2005, including illegal migrants.



**Figure 3. Muslim population growth in some EU states**

Immigration has brought in people of Islamic and other faiths into the EU member states. The EU's Muslim population in 2009 reached 13 million. Some countries with large percentage of Muslims are- France 8%, Netherlands 6%, Germany 4%, and the UK 3%. The growth in Muslim populations has brought into sharp focus the issue of compatibility of Islamic way of life (including the Sharia) with the legal and cultural systems in the EU. Some active issues are - women's rights, wearing of religious symbols such as the veil and the hijab, public prayers, and personal law. At the same time currents of fundamentalism and violent extremism in the Muslim world have exacerbated tensions.

To a lesser extent, such differences have also affected migrants who practice other faiths, such as Sikhism, in the EU. The right to establish places of worship is also not always available in certain countries where the primacy of one particular faith is part of the constitution.

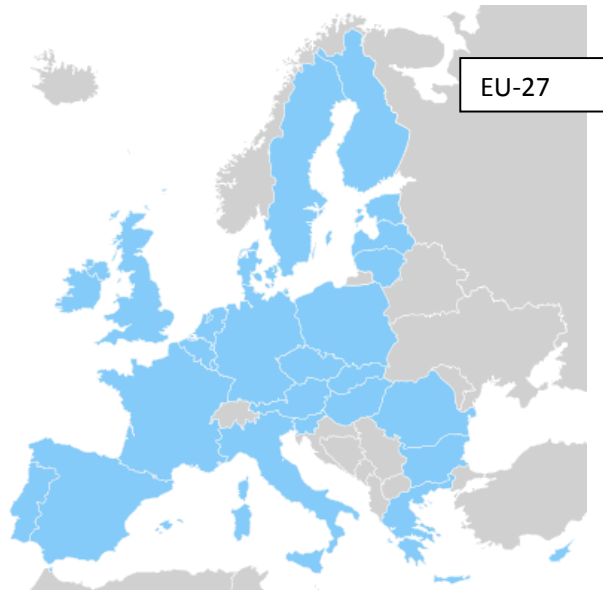
The conflict with religious and cultural differences and practices has led some in the EU to question the basic assumptions of social cohesion and multiculturalism. On the political front the repercussions have been a rise in support for conservative and narrow nationalistic thinking. There has been a polarization between those who advocate greater safeguards for minority rights, and those who advocate greater discipline and conformity to the core values of the majority.

### **Social Cohesion and the EU**

In social sciences the term “social cohesion” refers to the bonds or glue that brings people together in a society. Within a society it refers to the relationship between diverse segments of society, cutting across cultural, social and economic disparities and divergences. Within the EU the notion of social cohesion relates to interstate cohesion and solidarity, harmonization and reduction of social and economic disparities, and cross cultural understanding. The five different dimensions of social cohesion are - material conditions, passive social relationships, active social relationships, social inclusion and social equality.

Can social cohesion remain confined to the domain of interstate relations in the context of free movement of people within the EU? Social cohesion in the EU context does not require nationals of EU member states to give up cultural identity and heritage and submerge into the host country. Beyond a point, social cohesion is linked with multiculturalism and tolerance of differences, especially when there are large scale movements of people across the EU.

### **Experience of plural multicultural societies**



28 states+7 UTs, 9 religions, 23 languages, 1200 mn pop, 6 national and 47 regional parties; Union, State and Concurrent lists of subjects

27 members, 500 mn pop, 23 languages; three pillars of competencies

**Figure 4. Diversity in India and the EU**

It is relevant here to look at the experience of other multicultural societies, such as India, the US and Mauritius, for example. In these countries the main theme is “unity in diversity”. The rights of each group of society to retain and develop their own cultural identity within the framework of the constitution are guaranteed. Indeed, the presence of cultural diversity lends richness and durability to the national fabric. In India, for example, there are 23 official languages, 28 states, 9 major religious faiths among the population of some 1.2 billion, living in a liberal and federal democracy with sharing of powers between the Union and the States.

In India, the challenge has been to reconcile multiculturalism with the need to eliminate religious practices considered to be unacceptable a modern democratic state. Such practices include caste discrimination, child marriage, dowry, widow immolation, etc. advocated in the past by certain Hindu religious adherents. These were challenged by religious reformers in the early 1900s. Similarly certain practices found in Muslim societies would not find place in a modern state. Muslim reformers in India have challenged restrictions on women’s’ rights. The

limits of multiculturalism are to be found when basic universal human rights are infringed. But the voluntary use of visible religious symbols like the hijab and turban cannot be seen as infringing the rights of others.

The existence of healthy and progressive multiculturalism within a democratic system enables such societies to more easily adapt to globalization, including assimilation and adaptation of new ideas and thoughts from abroad. The experience of the past would indicate that multicultural societies are durable and able to overcome challenges such as intolerance and cultural domination by one group. Indeed multiculturalism and democracy are mutually reinforcing.

The concept of religious tolerance is particularly important for India. The concept of secularism in India's context is not one of neutrality or indifference to religion- rather it is based on the need of members of each religious faith to understand and respect the universal tenets of all the other faiths. Gandhi's advice to a Hindu who had lost his son during religious riots is indeed telling – "go forth and find a Muslim boy who has lost his father, bring him up as your son, but make sure he becomes a good Muslim".

The partition of India with the creation of a separate state of Pakistan for Muslims, and the largest movement of refugees in human history in 1947, was a traumatic event. The troubled relations with Pakistan could have led to Muslims in India being seen as having divided loyalties. However, the Muslims in India have proved their loyalty and patriotism on numerous occasions, and are an integral part of India's cultural mosaic.

### **Challenges to multiculturalism in the EU**

Recently Germany's Chancellor Merkel, French President Sarkozy, and UK Prime Minister Cameron have stated that multiculturalism in the EU has been a failure. This can be seen as a reaction to several incidents in recent years which have increased tensions between Western European states and their Muslim populations: the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London attacks, the 2004 ban of the head scarf coupled with the 2011 ban of the "burqa" in France, the 2005 Paris

riots, the 2006 Danish cartoon incident, and several high-profile murders. The July 2011 killing spree in Norway by Anders Breivik, who preached against the “Islamization of Western Europe” and multiculturalism further underscored the deepening tensions.

The problems of integration of Muslim communities into Western European societies have prompted some to declare that multiple cultures cannot coexist and argue for assimilation. Merkel said that "The concept that we are now living side by side and are happy about it, does not work". She added that immigrants should integrate and adopt Germany's culture and values.

Cameron stated that the "doctrine of state multiculturalism" (promoted by the previous Labour government) has failed and will no longer be state policy. He stated that the UK needed a stronger national identity and signaled a tougher stance on groups promoting Islamist extremism. Sarkozy said "If you come to France, you accept to melt into a single community, which is the national community," he continued. "And if you do not want to accept that, you cannot be welcome in France".

All this signals a retreat from multiculturalism in the EU, and a shift towards harder postures towards cultural diversity. This could be motivated by electoral compulsions of leaders facing dwindling support on account of economic problems. In any event these developments have stimulated a vigorous discourse on multiculturalism and its place in the EU.

### **Implications for the future**

Retreating from multiculturalism would increase polarization, tensions and discord within EU states. There would be increasing polarization around this issue, with left oriented groups strongly defending multiculturalism. Extremist groups within migrant populations could gain support for militant actions to defend against perceived threats to cultural identity. Right wing groups could see the retreat from multiculturalism as a signal to intensify xenophobia and attacks on foreign communities. These developments would make it more difficult to reach



political consensus on important policy decisions. Restrictions on movement of foreign nationals into the EU and among EU states could increase.

Internally the EU could be weakened, as intra- and extra- EU multiculturalism cannot be separated. It may become more difficult for national of Eastern Europe to live and work in Western European states. Informal barriers to the movement of labour could be encouraged, with impact on productivity of business.

Externally, relations with countries of origin of migrants both within the EU and outside could be negatively impacted due to perceptions that migrants are being forced to abandon their cultural identities and merge with the mainstream population. People in the sending countries would see the EU as intolerant of and unwilling to accept cultural differences. The prospects for Turkey to join the EU would be further reduced. North African and Middle Eastern states may find it difficult to forge a closer association with the EU.

A balanced approach is required to multiculturalism. This should allow groups to preserve their cultural identity within a broad democratic framework. However, basic human rights and core values of the EU must be respected at the same time. Progressive Muslim states can be useful models to guide Muslim communities in the EU as they seek to participate in a modern state. There is enough room for a constructive compromise, which will add to the cultural richness of the EU and harness the energies of cultural minorities. These are challenges being faced by India and the EU.

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