

Is Interculturalism as a European Value?

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ABSTRACT

For the past 50 years the increase of immigration in Western Europe has been viewed as a necessary part of the economic development of these nations. Migrant workers have provided cheap labour when most needed, keeping West European economies competitive in an increasingly global market.

However, since the beginning of the current economic crisis the issue of immigration has become a central political feature. In 2011, the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, attacked British Multiculturalism echoing comments made by Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, in 2010. Concurrently, there has been a rise in the election success of nationalist parties in Western Europe and opinion polls often place immigration as one of the main concerns of voters.

In recent times the biggest issue is immigration from fellow EU nations as it is difficult to control the right of EU citizens to freedom of movement. Non-EU immigration can be capped and restricted by law, but recent patterns have led some Western governments to consider quota laws for migrant workers and even going as far as discussing the reintroduction of European borders and the renegotiation of the Schengen Agreement to prevent immigrants moving from one country to another once they have entered the European Union.

At the same time, the EU is promoting greater acceptance and cross-cultural tolerance programmes in Eastern European states, such as Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with the aim of developing greater harmony between ethnic groups who live and have migrated to the region.

On the one hand it would appear that the message from certain Western European countries is “No more immigration” while at the same time encouraging Eastern Europeans to be more tolerant and accepting of immigrants.

The aim of this paper is to examine some of the historical aspects of European immigration and migration as well as examine the political comments being made at present. Most importantly, the paper will address the issue of whether or not the idea of a multicultural society is part of European values and why, after more than fifty years of successful cross-European immigration, this issue has suddenly become a central problem in most EU nations.