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Immigration in Western Europe: social and political implications

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Abstract

This paper aims at discussing the most relevant social and political implications of mass immigration in the major countries of Western Europe. Firstly, this research discusses models of social integration in relation to France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy. Secondly, pluralism and multiculturalism are contrasted to point out the degree of diversity a single society may afford, avoiding the risk of breaking up. One of the most evident transformation in the political domain has been carried out by the affirmation of new radical right-wing parties in several countries. Finally, given the deeply rooted economic recession in the old continent, immigration has undergone a downward trend since economic and materialist worries have come back to the center of the political scene in many West European societies.

1. Introduction

Mass immigration in Western Europe from extra-EU countries has been one of the major and controversial phenomena occurred in the old continent in the last three decades. Indeed, immigration is key since it has brought about cultural diversity in almost all West European societies. Issues related to identity and solidarity in society has become central and debated in many European nation-states. Even though nations are imagined communities (Anderson 1991), they exist and matter. As noted by Martinelli, immigration involves nationalism, in particular its cultural and ethnic dimension. As stated by the author: «it is not a question of national sovereignty but of cultural cleavage» (Martinelli 2012). Thus, the supposed and widely debated decline of the nation-state can be analyzed as a crisis of nation within a state. Nationalism is thus directly linked to nation and is a somewhat disputed term because of its various meanings. However, the importance of nationalism is connected also to the enhancement of solidarity between people. Hence, nationalism allows for a connection between state and society. Besides, it supplies a basis for solidarity among citizens within the same political system (Martinelli 2012). The amount of immigrants from countries outside Europe has been considered both as an opportunity of cultural enrichment for the host society and as a risk of national community breaking up. Indeed, citizenship is of particular importance since it involves the right to benefit of welfare state provisions. Citizenship is key because constitutes the connecting elements among those living in the same society. Hence, it is the founding factor of solidarity and conducive to integration (Cesareo e Blangiardo 2009, 2011). Questions arise not only concerning resources. In addition, the sentiment of belonging to a given nation is somewhat disputed. In particular, the novel right to the difference, i.e. the so-called cultural citizenship, is tricky since it puts under pressure the equality principle in Western societies. The increasing weakness of nationhood is confirmed by the arising cosmopolitan citizenship (Beck 2003), i.e. a proposition to disconnect citizenship and nation, thus envisaging a post-national membership.

Therefore, this paper aims at discussing the main consequences of immigration from both a sociocultural and a political point of view. On the one hand, immigration is treated in terms of models pursued in the major European countries, in particular

confronting the assimilation versus the multicultural frame. Secondly, in terms of culture and values, frictions between pluralism and multiculturalism are emerging. On the other hand, immigration is focused on regarding its influences over party system configuration, with particular attention to the new radical right and the emergence of xenophobia against immigrants. In the end, the weakening of migration flows in recent years is discussed since the economic crisis has undermined pull factors towards Western Europe.

2. Citizenship and models of social integration

Citizenship is a key element. Briefly stated, it deals with the relationship between the state and a single person. The nature and founding values of this relationship change from state to state and over time within the same state. Citizenship involves certain rights as well as obligations. Essentially, it this can be acquired in various ways (Cesareo 2012, 31–32), but three principles are pivotal: ius sanguinis, ius soli or naturalization. In the first case, citizenship is inherited by parents following the so-called right of blood, i.e. one person is granted a certain citizenship because one or both parents hold it. In this vein, it is transmitted through ancestry. In the second situation, citizenship is automatically attributed to one person just because she/he was born within the territory of that state. This rule is inspired by the so-called right of soil. It originated in England because of the empire extent and the aim was to grant citizenship and secure loyalty to the crown. The third situation is when the state attributes citizenship to one person based on some stipulated criteria, i.e. residence in the country for many years, ability to communicate using the language of the host country, having successfully passed a test, and the like. Concerning its traits, conceived in contemporary terms, membership to a nation-state should be egalitarian, sacred, national, democratic, unique and socially consequential (Brubaker 1992, 380).

A key issue of every organized group is to ensure solidarity among its members. In societal terms, this can be referred to as integration. This involves that a single person learn and internalize values and principles of her/his society. The two fundamental

sources of nation-building in Europe were the French Revolution and the German romanticism. The first one is based on the ideas of unity and indivisibility of the nation, and the radical nationalism of the Jacobins. The second one is underpinned by cultural and linguistic credentials and, to some extent, to "blood and ground" (Martinelli 2012). In general terms, the French nation is mostly constituted by political and civic factors, while culture and ethnicity are more central in the German one. In Western Europe, different models of integration have been identified. The first one is the archetypal model based on assimilation.

As previously noted, the idea of nation is conceived following the Enlightenment tradition that stressed civic and subjective elements. As noted by Melotti (2004), France has experienced immigration since the end of the XIX century because of demographic and military reasons. The country is known for its readiness to include immigrants, though represents the paradigm of assimilation (Zanfrini 2004). Indeed, the French model is underpinned by the principle of equality among citizens. Ethnic minorities are thus not entitled to special treatments since the *égalité* is a founding principle. Two corresponding features of the French state are centralization and homogenization. That explains why France is very often regarded as a strong nation-state. Consequently, immigrants are expected to assimilate with language, culture, and values of French society. In this sense, assimilation reinforces equality: the single immigrant is supposed to abandon the culture of her/his country of origin to adopt the French one. Briefly, forsaking the original identity is demanded to ensure solidarity and integration. This implies that jus soli has always been privileged in governmental policies on immigration. The basic idea is that citizenship is granted to people so that they can enjoy the national well-being, as a compensation for the abandonment of their original culture.

Similarly, to France, the United Kingdom has a colonial legacy exemplified, at the institutional level, by the Commonwealth. That said, the British model is based on a multicultural conception of society. This means that, unlike France, cultural diversity is permitted. Hence, immigrants are not expected to leave their original identity. Thus, homogenization is not encouraged and efforts are directed towards contrasting discriminations based on race. The principle of race equality has inspired a great bulk

of legislation as witnessed by Race Relations Acts in 1966, 1968, and 1976 (Melotti 2004, 27; Zanfrini 2004, 45), even though in practice relationships between the majority group and minorities have been difficult. The basic idea is that hegemony, i.e. political power, is always managed by the Britons (Melotti 2004, 23), while minorities can constitute their communities to preserve their original customs and habits. The egalitarian principle of the ideal model of membership was infringed because of blurred positions linked to the Commonwealth, i.e. citizen of the Commonwealth was considered as a special category, then distinguished according to «the place of birth, their date of arrival and their possible British ancestry» (Melotti 2004, 25).

The German idea of nation was framed more in romantic terms where "objective" elements prevail. In this context, citizenship is conceived as Volk-centered and nationhood is intended in ethno-cultural terms. Through the principle of jus sanguinis, citizenry is understood exclusively as a community of descents. Indeed, birth on the German sole has no bearing on citizenship, so jus soli is not considered even for second or third generations of immigrants. Germany is the epitome of Guest-worker (Gastarbeiter) model and is thus known for its reluctance to include immigrants. In that model, enforced during the 1950s until the early 1970s, immigrants were seen as guest-workers settling in the country only for a fixed period of time. This was linked to the needs of economy and productivity. Hence, they should be ready to leave the country at every moment, depending on economic cycles. The ideology underpinning the Guest-worker model was anyway deeply rooted since Germany has been claiming for a long time of not being a country of immigration. In practice, immigrants settled down permanently and, since the beginning of the 1980s (Zanfrini 2004), the right to family reunion was recognized. In 1999, the law of naturalization was reformed and some elements of jus soli and jus domicili have been recognized (Zanfrini 2004, 37).

As Melotti noted (2004), Italy is now the third country of immigration in Europe and the first one in the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, it is the country that has carried out the greatest number of amnesties (five regulations between 1986 and 2002) and the last

one was the largest ever done in Europe. A key premise is that only recently Italy has become a country of immigration, whilst for many decades had been a country of emigration. Pull factors are not attractive, indeed immigration in the country started when Italy was not in a period of economic growth. Thus, push factors in the country of origin are decisive. Italy has a quite peculiar and ambiguous idea of nation where romantic and Enlightenment factors are mixed in various forms. In a rather contradictory way, Italy has always emphasized jus sanguinis, because it wanted to grant citizenship to many Italians that left the country to emigrate in other countries all around the world. In general, regularization has granted immigrants the same civil, social, and economic rights of Italian citizens, saved political rights recognized only to communitarian citizens who may vote and stand in local elections following EU norms.

3. Tolerance and differences: tensions and limits.

The increasing diversification within West European societies, among groups with different cultures and habits, raises issues dealing with identity and citizenship. This is key concerning the degree of pluralism within a given society and its relationship with multiculturalism. When the latter one assumes radical and ideological traits, the problem of a clash with pluralism is plausible. In the light of the increasing importance that minorities play in Western democracies, it is useful to compare two theoretical positions confronting pluralism and multiculturalism. Here, these are exemplified, respectively, by Giovanni Sartori (2000) and Matteo Gianni (1997). The issue deals with the integration of immigrants into the host society. In particular, whether citizenship is still sufficient to ensure their integration so as to strengthen cohesion in society. In every state, a certain degree of integration is essential to favor the combination of different elements in a unified whole. This is quite straightforward since inner divisions are the typical threat for all states.

As discussed by Sartori (2000), the importance of debating immigration goes back to the distinction between a closed and open society (Popper 1950). By consequence, a key question is the extent to which a society can be open, i.e. how much a pluralistic society can be pluralistic, avoiding the risk of implosion. The Sartori essay is of

particular importance since it underlines that pluralism and multiculturalism are not synonyms. On the contrary, the current meaning of multiculturalism – the presence of different cultural groups within the same society, claiming a different cultural identity – is not equivalent to pluralism. The latter is older and thus has to be analyzed before the former. First, pluralism is not an equivalent of complex societies, i.e. it does not refer simply to a differentiated societal structure. A second relevant distinction is between two adjectives: plural and pluralistic. All over the world, societies are internally diversified. This is straightforward as a natural consequence of human nature. Nevertheless, a pluralistic society is something more. Indeed, plural societies are not necessarily pluralistic. The core of pluralism stems from the principle of tolerance, hence it allows for dissent and considers diversity as a value. The political translation of pluralism is multi-partyism, i.e. several (a limited number not greater than 5-6) parties competing for seizing power through regular elections. Since pluralism is based on tolerance and admits dissent, conflict is moderated and do not degenerate into war. Pluralism is defined by Sartori (2000) as an iterating process bringing about a changing compromise resulting from divergent beliefs. This conflict is channeled through the norms and rules of liberal democracy. Its regulatory principle is the majority rule. Even though the tyranny of majority has to be avoided, the validity of that principle is not infringed when it is used to take decisions as in parliamentary voting sessions. Hence, tolerance makes possible to consider divisions among parties as positive and the same logic is applied to society, with special regards to its inner spheres. That explains why pluralism is conducive to a secularized society and, vice versa, the latter cannot exist without pluralism. In other terms, the various spheres in society - e.g., politics, religion, and economy - have to be kept as separated. In addition, when dealing with a pre-existing multicultural society, the aim of pluralism is favoring dialogue and respect, not fomenting intolerance. Indeed, pluralism does not point to exacerbate differences and increase skepticism among cultures. On the contrary, its goal is to reduce the gap to strengthen consensus in society. Another structural trait of a pluralistic society is the

presence of multiple associations whose membership is spontaneous. Moreover, memberships are cross-cutting so that they do not reinforce each other in a cumulative way. Indeed, cumulative memberships usually strengthen encapsulated identities and, by consequence, increase the possibility of aggressive relationships. Thus, pluralism avoids this risk and allows for the moderation of conflict.

This point of views comes at odds with another sociological and philosophical perspective relying on the so-called differentiated citizenship. As well exemplified by Gianni (1997), the current liberal societies shows increasing tensions due to immigration from extra-UE countries. Societies in Western Europe are nowadays multi-cultural and this imposes a critical review of their normative premises. In the old continent, multiculturalism refers mainly to religious, ethnic or linguistic groups that have to cohabitate within the same political systems. Unlike in the past, liberal citizenship has no more the potential to integrate new people into multi-cultural society. Indeed, citizenship has represented for a long time the key vector of political integration as shared link among individual having different cultures and lifestyles. This means that the state, and in general the public sector, has been neutral and blind towards cultural differences. One of the key elements underpinning contemporary liberal-democracies is the impersonality of public institutions. Hence, a differentiated citizenship presupposes that public institutions are not blind anymore. On the contrary, they actively recognize differences (Gutmann 1994). Gianni (1997, 498) admits that public recognition of divergent collective identities within the same society can be risky. This is critical from two points of view. From a theoretical one, it implies the infringement of universalism, i.e. all citizens are equal. From a practical one, it can entail the societal disintegration through social conflicts, since it would delete the minimal core identity shared by all citizens. In other terms, cultural differentiation might carry out balkanization. However, Gianni claims that (1997, 498) a well-conceived recognition of cultural groups may reinforce citizenship and its strength as a factor of integration. The first problem of a differentiated citizenship is to single out cultural groups. In other terms, the first big hurdle is to define what a cultural group is. This is key since it determines who benefits from a differentiated treatment by public institutions. At a societal level, society can be defined as a set of norms, values, and models transmitted

to individuals through the process of socialization. The more these are absorbed by individuals, the more cohesion is strong. That said, defining a culture is somewhat complicated from a juridical point of view. To disentangle this problem, a suggest criterion is pragmatically to look at what is done in politics in the name of cultural identity. This idea stems from Gellner (1989) and it allows avoiding too formal details in defining a culture. In this case, recognition is based on the collective dimensions of outsiders. Respect is a key aspect and it implies being considered as worthy and able to participate in the determination of collective values, despite cultural and material differences. It should be noted that multiculturalism does not challenge only the liberal conception of citizenship, but also its efficacy in terms of political integration. Indeed, there could be citizens that do not feel integrated in society, even though they do enjoy citizenship. Gianni specifies (1997, 502) that political integration implies the possibility to actively participate in defining collective values with the concrete capacity to affect final results of deliberating process. Hence, recognition has a decisive role since it supplies the basis to build individual and collective identities. Through public recognition, a cultural entity becomes a political entity. Hence, unlike the liberal conception and its basic neutrality, citizens become culturally differentiated.

The slippery issue is that multiculturalism may transform into an ideology. In this sense, the presence of several cultures within a given society is considered to be good. This means that multiculturalists may point to the preservation of differences within society, thereby enhancing the risk of clash. Of course, this can go beyond their intentions. They preserve separated identities, encouraging the preservation of different habits and cultures, preventing reciprocal influences among them. This can bring to a segregated society where several groups live apart these separated groups can assume a defensive or an aggressive stance towards the others. This can trigger competition for seizing power and shaping society in accordance to one's own values. Therefore, demographic dimensions of groups are fundamental.

A second important point is that there is no differentiation among immigrants in the

multiculturalist discourse. Indeed, these discourses are generally difference-blind concerning immigrants and their country of origin. This means that, for instance, between Muslim and Chinese, no differences are taken into account. This perspective seems naive and contradictory. In the first case, it is not possible to treat all immigrants as the same, regardless for instance to their religion. This is always a key element since many values and habits stem from religious beliefs. In the second case, this version of multiculturalism is based on stressing and exciting differences. Therefore, it seem contradictory not to consider them when dealing with immigration policies. Namely, differences are weighted when comparing natives and immigrants, but not among groups of immigrants. This opens the floor to a related issue. Just to mention the clash of civilizations foreseen by Samuel Huntington and Sartori again (2000), a thorny problem concerns the presence of cultural antagonists, rather than cultural foreigners. In other terms, there are two questions: 1) how much diversity a Western society can sustain? 2) Is it possible for a Western society to endure cultural enemies within its borders? According to Sartori, this a risk bringing to the disintegration of the pluralistic community. Moreover, citizenship has to be granted only in exchange for an acceptance of basic values of host societies by immigrants.

These are the two basic problems brought about by the politics of recognition of differences. Collective rights are insidious, paving the way to multiple particularistic demands from peoples towards public sectors.

4. Party system widening: the new right.

Influences of immigration cannot be narrowed to citizenship, identity, and state borders (Pasini 2011). Besides, it is often related to the recent uprising of xenophobia in Western Europe. This feeling is often depicted as a reaction from an economic and cultural point of view towards the threat of massive migrations. In the first case, immigrants are blamed to increase competition for low-skilled jobs, so as they challenge the more disadvantaged social strata. In the second case, especially when migrants are Muslims, their religion and culture is reputed as incompatible with Western society in terms of secular and liberal democratic values. Therefore, the large

presence of immigrants, especially when concentrated in certain areas of the territory, has fostered hostility and fears by the indigenous, i.e. the natives. Political entrepreneurs who founded new political parties to meet their requests have seized their demands for protection. The enlargement of party systems can be explained also by the other way around, i.e. political leaders took advantage of certain sentiments within the population, have nourished them and gave political representation to consolidate their power. Regardless of the relative importance of political demands and supplies, in the awareness of their interaction, the emergence of a new radical right is a phenomenon involving all Western and several Eastern European countries. This is clear sign that a feeling of insecurity, skepticism and anxiety has settled down in part of the natives, in relation to the new challenges posed by migrations and globalization. Briefly, immigration has altered the usual and long-standing configuration of party systems, as clarified below.

Lipset and Rokkan (1967) identified two major historical events in Europe at the end of the 19th century: the National and Industrial Revolutions. The former concerned the process of nation building and the establishment of modern nation-states, while the latter changed the configuration of economic and commercial interests. Each revolution brought about a couple of cleavages. “Cleavage” is a key concept: this is «a division of individuals, groups or organizations among whom conflict may arise» (Lane e Ersson 1999). Hence, the National Revolution produced two cleavages. The first relates to the conflict between state and church involving the control of mass education, historically belonging to religious schools. From then on, it was advocated as a new competence of the state in order to shape loyalty of its citizens. The second cleavage is the conflict between centre and periphery because of the intention of the state to establish an official language and a common culture, thereby suppressing those local customs and traditions not in line with the mounting national paradigm. On the other hand, the Industrial Revolution induced two important cleavages. The first one is the well-known conflict between capital and labor, i.e. the opposition between entrepreneurs and

manual workers. The second one is the urban-rural conflict based on frictions between divergent business interests of, respectively, bourgeoisie and farmers.

As the two scholars argued (Lipset e Rokkan 1967), given this four-fold division the preeminent cleavage was the contention between capitalists and workers over the redistribution of resources, as a consequence of increasing profits generated by the industrial revolution all over Europe. Indeed, economic left-wing policies defend state interventionism, whereas right-wing policies enhance free market competition. Actually, economic systems have been at the heart of the struggle between two opposite Weltanschauung during the Cold War, i.e. the capitalist versus the communist world. The presence of the capital-work cleavage in all West European party systems is crucial, as pointed out also by Lijphart (2001) in his set of 36 democracies. That said, the first signs of change could not be overlooked.

Ronald Inglehart pioneering studies (1977) showed how, already in the 1970s, new cultural predispositions had rooted in the most economically advanced West European countries. Since the end of WWII, the typical conflict between capital and labor had profoundly shaped the structure of party competition. However, Flanagan and Inglehart influent research (1987) pointed out that dualism between the labor force and entrepreneurs was showing its first rifts to encompass all interests at stake. Hence, the term post-materialism was forged to catch this new phenomenon in fieri. Its label underlined that the new axis overstepped the usual materiality of the distributive conflict. Self-fulfillment, new life styles, anti-conformism, anti-dogmatic approaches, freedom of individual choice, and feminism: these were the main rising feelings pushed further by a so-called silent revolution (Inglehart 1977). This was supported by young generations whose sustenance and security needs were taken for granted in the vast majority of cases. This perspective shares an analogy with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970): the American psychologist posited that the needs of human beings could be hierarchically classified. In fact, every single person would satisfy first those at a lower stage, before passing to the higher ones. Hence, physiological needs are at the very basic level, followed by safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The last one is crucial as it implies that a person will try to realize one's own full potential, i.e. self-fulfillment, only once all other needs have been previously satisfied.

This schema helps construct an analogy with societies, conceived as a whole: if human beings hold a hierarchy of needs, then they may project them onto society as well. In this vein, post-industrialized countries have mostly solved the problem of physiological. The gradual transformation of social demands influenced the economic domain as well, since an innovative conception of the environment put under discussion the model of undisputed expansion of capitalism, in particular when endangering the environment. The breakthrough of personal libertarianism and a renewed ecological sensibility progressively intertwined, backing the emergence of Green parties. The main assumption of the so-called New Politics was, on the one hand, the loss of relevance of left-wing and right-wing stances in purely economic terms — i.e., state vs. market — and, on the other side, a rising role of values in dividing voters and parties.

The 1980s marked also the decline of Marxism with the demise of the Soviet Union and its system of satellite states in Eastern Europe. The dismantling of iron curtain allowed old frictions and new forms of conflict to emerge, finding a space of expression for a long a time restricted by the encompassing rivalry between the two superpowers. The engine of this new phase was globalization. In general terms, this refers to a series of phenomena having, as a common denominator, the creation of a global context of action and increasing the interdependence of cultures, peoples, and states. Direct consequences for the nation-state are porosity of frontiers, weaken ability to intervene, and growing difficulties in managing complex economic and cultural issues. From local to global, time and spatial coordinates of states, markets, and communities have sensationally changed (Martinelli 2008). The perception of a “global proximity” entails that consequences of events reverberate all over the globe. The easiness of circulation brings about a direct dialogue among systems of thoughts and values that have been separately cultivated for centuries.

However, whether globalization supplies uppermost and uncommon opportunities, it also produces fears and anxieties. Indeed, not all social strata are adequately equipped to seize new opportunities and take advantage. Those who do not hold an adequate

knowledge made of technical, scientific, and cultural skills, risk marginalization and damages in an environment open to worldwide competition. Therefore, this strengthens reluctance, i.e. forces and values of opposite sign, revitalizing traditional customs and the local dimension. To counter cosmopolitan and libertarian stances, this backlash fosters authoritarian attitudes. In particular, authoritarianism supports the defense of an ordered and homogeneous society based on traditional values. Law-and-order is a key principle and societal roles, expectations, and identities are clear-cut. Instead, exclusionism points more strictly to the definitions of insiders and outsiders, by drawing dividing lines among those who belong to the native community (from which citizenship rights stem) and those who are "aliens" and therefore excluded. Concisely, this scenario constitutes the fertile background favoring the emergence of new radical and exclusionist right parties.

Therefore, economic and materialistic stances do not represent the core of right-wing ideology. As already remarked, besides a xenophobic sentiment, new political forces put forth also a set of «new priorities and issues, not treated by the established parties, a disillusionment towards parties in general, a growing lack of confidence in the political system and its institutions, and a general pessimism in the future», so that they promoted a sort of «'silent counter-revolution'» (Ignazi 1992, 6). Hence, the upcoming of a New Politics (S. C. Flanagan e Lee 2003) is linked to the raise of a new cleavage on which parties divide and compete, and this a product of two main historical processes: since the 1970s, the advent of a post-industrial society (Bell 1973) and, more recently, the spread of globalization (Kriesi et al. 2006). The 'newness' is justified since new political divisions are related to values, rather than social classes. As highlighted by Cole (2005, 204) «these parties may represent a 'new right' that has developed to challenge the 'new left' on issues non-economic in nature, such as nationalism and law and order». Even though, this new competition is acknowledge by many scholars, the declining party identification of voters and «the perceived inability of established parties to address political issues have created openings in the arenas of party competition for entrepreneurial parties to exploit» (Cole 2005, 204). By consequence, New Left has given rise to a counter-offensive reaction by the New Right enhancing an authoritarian and communitarian tide (Kriesi et al. 2006).

In terms of electoral success, the French National Front has been considered for a long time the early prototype of radical right-wing party. Actually, this party was already founded in the 1970s and gained its first electoral important results in the 1980s. Its historical and long-standing leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, was able also to get to the run-off in the 2002 presidential election, when was then strongly defeated by Jacques Chirac. In the recent presidential election, his daughter who has seized the leadership was able to get nearly 20 per cent of the popular vote. The party is characterized by a strong leadership and is generally disadvantaged by the double-round electoral system for the Assemblée Nationale. Its number of seats is neatly lower than its electoral support. France was just the first country known for the strength of the radical right. In terms of electoral percentage, Austria is another key context with the outbreak of Jorge Haider's Party for Freedom at the end of 1990s. The event was so shocking that the European Union threaten the country with sanctions, fearing the weakening of democracy whether the radical right would have participated in the government. Other important expressions of right-wing radicalism can be traced all over Europe. In Flanders, the separatist Flemish Interest (before, Flemish Block) supports radical anti-immigrant stances. In Denmark, the Danish People's Party first aim is to protect the generous Nordic welfare state from the accused immigrant scroungers. The phenomenon of welfare chauvinism is known also in the other Scandinavian country: in Finland (True Finns), in Sweden (Sweden Democrats), and in Norway as well (Progress Party). In the Netherlands, where tolerance and libertarianism have a long tradition, has seen the emergence of a strong Islamophobic block. This was firstly animated by Pim Fortyun and, after his assassination, by Geer Wilders. In both cases, the party is liberal from a social point of view, but strongly against the supposed Islamic invasion and domination of the country. On the same wave, the Union of the Democratic Centre in Switzerland has gathered a consistent number of votes. Moreover, the referendum against the construction of new minarets is a strong signal of the climate. For historical reason, the right in Germany is regarded with suspicion. Its

endeavors to emerge are so far somewhat weak and seen with suspect. Only minor consensus in minor elections, i.e. European or local elections, has been gathered so far. In Italy, the far right was excluded by the conventio ad excludendum, because of the Fascist legacy and embodied in the Constitution. However, there are parties belonging to the right-wing area, without claiming any legacy with the fascist past. Besides, the Northern League has been historically the most important party in electoral terms supporting anti-immigration policies.

The point at stake here is that the right has gained centrality all over Europe. Not only in the Western but also in the Eastern part, even though with different nuances linked often to national minorities within the border of a state, when that minority is loyal to a neighboring state. However, the right presents of course different traits concerning the national context. Nevertheless, despite these expectable differences, all this parties share an anti-immigrant stance and the idea that natives, nationals or in a specific portion of the territory, has to be considered as first. In other terms, natives have not to be disadvantaged by immigrants, e.g. housing and jobs are two examples when the primacy of native is often advocated.

5. Economic crisis: a step back towards materialist issues.

The downfall of national GNPs in Europe is enduring and most of the economies are stuck in deep recession. By consequence, pull factors attracting immigrants in Europe are increasingly weaker. Therefore, it is straightforward to expect fluxes of immigrants to decrease. Thus, problems and worries generally associated with immigration are losing salience in terms of political competition. In fact, parties tend to give a slight relevance to issues having a feeble potential to affect voter preferences. Indeed, economic depression dragging down Western Europe – since 2008 and, particularly in Italy, since 2011 – shifts worries of public opinion towards materialist issues like unemployment, welfare state service, wage levels and the like. Therefore, these topics are coming back to the center of the political scene.

Eurobarometer data confirms the declining role of immigration. Indeed, figures show that more than two third of the respondents consider the national economic situation as

negative. In this vein, the peak was reached in 2009 when the percentage was equal to 78 per cent. Currently, that level has fallen to 72 per cent, though an overall majority of Europeans complains about national economy. Concerning immigration, only 8 per cent of the respondents consider it such as one of the two most important issues facing one's own country. Hence, a very low percentage in comparison to those attributed to unemployment and economic situation, respectively 48 and 37 per cent in autumn 2012.

In the lifespan between the two more recent reports, data have kept fairly stable. Differences between spring and autumn 2012 point out the increasing salience attributed to economic issues: unemployment (from 46 to 48 per cent) and economic situation (from 35 to 37 per cent). Through the same temporal perspective, the percentage attributed to immigration is fixed at 8 per cent. Only in the United Kingdom, immigration is cited as one of the two major issues facing one's own country: in this case, it reached 24 per cent of the answer and ranked third. That said, beyond pure numbers, which are the consequences of these trends in societal and political terms?

In the first case, tensions between pluralism and multiculturalism are less intense. The less the number of new immigrants, the less the perception of being "invaded". Then, immigrants in their host country can become more prone to dialogue and interaction with natives. With less radical competition for housing and jobs, for them it is easier to acquire a higher status and improved conditions of live. When immigrants are less numerous, the majority does not feel threaten by minorities. The latter one has a minor power in closing into itself and is forced to open and integrate into the host society. Hence, a silent integration of immigrants, already living in a given host country, is expected during those periods when immigration decreases.

In the second case, a downturn of radical right parties is expectable since the threat of new immigrants is undermined. However, this conjecture has not been validated by the recent 2012 general elections in Western Europe. In France, Marine Le Pen came close to 18 per cent in the first round of presidential elections. Looking at percentages,

this was the best performance ever done by a National Front candidate, even though she was not able to repeat the breakthrough of her father in 2002. In the legislative elections of the following month, the party won only two seats. This unsuccessful score is linked to particular mechanisms of the two-round electoral system. Indeed, the National Front secured 13.6 per cent of the popular vote in the first round. Hence, as widely know, that electoral system is strongly disrepresentative saved the two most powerful parties. In the Netherlands, the Islamophobic Geert Wilder's party (Partij voor de Vrijheid) lost slightly more than five percentage points compared to 2010 (10.1 versus 15.5 per cent) and nine deputies in the Tweede Kamere (15 versus 24). Despite of a clear setback, its electoral support is still significant and the amount of seats controlled by Pvv has forced the two major parties to join in a grand coalition. Hence, Geert Wilders is still an influent politician in Dutch politics. In Greece, the new party Golden Dawn has made inroads that have feared European public opinion since it is labeled as a neo-Nazi party. Its electoral performances were substantially the same, around 7 per cent, in the two election held at one month distance.

These results corroborate the hypothesis stating the new radical right is shifting its attention to the EU issues. This means that those parties are not just opposing mass immigrations coming from extra-EU countries. However, they are also contrasting the political and bureaucratic European state. They defend national states and, in general terms, a Europe composed of "small homelands" against a unique federal state. They are against globalization and defend the local dimension against worldwide finance. They are profoundly Euro-skeptic because they fear Europe to be prone to delete national identities and customs. EU is seen as the stronghold of austerity policies, supported by continental and Nordic countries leaded by Germany. By this way, the EU has become the target of harsh protestation against austerity measures that are responsible for reducing public spending of national governments. This has provoked a circle of negative effects leading to a general impoverishment of people, contraction of internal demand and increase of unemployment. The protest of the radical right is oriented towards those powers that EU is managing and that, for a long time, have been private domain of national states. In a historical moment where immigration is declining, the radical right has been able to seize the opportunity to consolidate its

position by supporting protestation against the upcoming European federal state, giving voice to all those social poor strata who are disadvantaged by globalization and austerity measures.

Despite of different speeds, West European societies are becoming more and more complex and variegated. The cohabitation of multiple ethnic groups is a widespread reality. This means that questions linked to pluralism and multiculturalism are central. Their importance in electoral terms depends greatly on the economic situation. Given that economic recession is a trouble for many European countries, it is rather expectable that immigration is less feared. However, given demographic balance among the majority group and the others, issues regarding rights and duties should be faced and regulated to prevent urban upheavals. It seems that, at present, the best way to preserve pace and respect in society is a rational pluralism. The multiculturalist model seems rather risky in that it enhances divergent identities within the same society.

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