

POLICIES OF PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION OF THE CULTURE AND IDENTITY OF IMMIGRANTS

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Abstract: *This paper addresses the phenomenon of immigrant integration within a community in terms of what is currently called cultural integration, with landmarks such as government policies in the European community and the ways to implement in practice. This theme is approached from two angles: the way in which organizations can provide services that are more accessible to immigrants- and which help increase their sense of belonging and civic participation - which means employment of migrants to participate actively in society. The first angle of approach relates to the ways in which different institutions and organizations involved in the integration of immigrants (by providing social services to them) can develop the latter's intercultural skills. The second angle of approach concerns the ways in which immigrants and non-immigrants can be mobilized around different facets of active citizenship or around religious dialogue. Realizing a synergy of the two angles of approach in terms of cultural integration of immigrants, an important aspect of this paper is to argue the issue of interpretation of the role of the media in this context.*

Keywords: cultural integration; civic participation; intercultural skills; fairness; immigrants

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of immigration is very complex and with multiple economic, social, political and cultural implications. The socio-cultural integration of immigrants is a subject of debate that frequently occupies the European center scene. Desirability of integration derives directly from fundamental human rights and is a natural result of the constitutive principles of the European Union, but also of our country, stemming from the values that have built both the European Treaty and the Constitution of Romania.

In July 2011, the European Commissioner for Internal Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, declared that "the success of the integration [of the European Union] implies that migrants should be given the opportunity to participate fully in the life of their new

communities. Learning the language of the host country, access to jobs and education and the opportunity to support himself represents the essential elements of a successful integration" [1].

In terms of cultural integration of immigrants, EU policies aimed at: respect for the fundamental values of a democratic society, respect for the rights of immigrants to preserve their own identity, to recognize and uphold the appropriate rights and obligations of immigrants, comparable to those of EU citizens, the active participation of immigrants in all aspects of community life under the same conditions as all other citizens of the EU. Their cultural integration requires the following: learning the language of the host country; understanding the rules of society and its cultural differences.

Thus, integration should be understood as a process of active participation undertaken freely by immigrants. It therefore demands of the immigrants to comply with the rules and the fundamental values of the society in which they want to integrate, but without sacrificing their own identity. On the other hand, to the process of active participation likewise contributes the host society by ensuring the legal framework of rights and obligations that offers to immigrants the possibility of participation in the economic, social, civil and cultural life [2].

2. European governmental policies of integration of immigrants

In postwar and postcolonial Europe in the period between 1950 and 1970, the immigrants arriving on the Mainland either from former colonies, or as labor force with a particular contract which had been, specially brought in certain European countries (such as Germany, France or Switzerland), were the responsibility of the States that gave them permission to stay and access to paying jobs. They were subjected to the laws of those countries in terms of citizenship and nationality. The Governments of European Nations established rules of admission on the national territory and out of the country, as well as the system of visa and residency system [3].

The development of the European legal framework on migration has imposed a political construct that includes the idea of cooperation, through the joint exercise of national sovereignty. If at the national level, the political reactions against immigrants may reflect the ideas of the nation, such as tolerance, diversity and the individual option of the States on the integration of migrants, in terms of their access to the labor market and border controls, reaching a political agreement within the European Union was necessary for the delimitation and determining of the immigration phenomenon [4].

The foundations for a common policy with regard to migration may be originated in the

period 1985 - 1986, when the Governments of Germany, France and the Netherlands have signed the Schengen Agreement, which established common procedures on immigration in the signatory States [5] and when they, subsequently agreed to adopt the Single European Act [6]. By creating Area of freedom, security and justice, the European Union offered a guarantee for the free movement of persons, ensuring the security of European citizens, as well as making a differentiation between internal and external borders.

The European thinking on immigration was constantly concerned with the development of government policies for the integration of immigrants. Thus, in countries such as Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands national legislation relating to the integration of immigrants was adopted in the period of 1998 - 1999. It provided a national framework on integration and measures that took into account the local circumstances and individual needs of immigrants. The national programs that deal with the integration of immigrants, comprised generally three main components: language courses, sessions of orientation and introduction to the culture of the host society, as well as courses of training and professional reorientation, closely related to the labor market. These programs, mandatory to some degree, were individualized in most cases according to the needs of immigrants. The immigrant was invited to an interview to assess his own skill level, education, practical experience and linguistic skills. Based on this interview, it is further determined which elements will compose the individual program of immigrant integration. These immigrant integration policies are still preserved and applied today.

The programs of integration of immigrants in European countries can be linked together into three broad categories. Thus, we can identify: individualized service packages, in which the State finances the local authorities to carry out programs of

integration; situations where the State finances only certain elements of the package (for example, only language courses, cultural orientation, training, temporary accommodation or financial assistance, activities that are not necessarily related to each other) and the circumstances in which the State does not fund directly programs of integration, these activities largely being left in the purview of non-governmental organizations. The first category of service packages are used in countries like Finland, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden; the second category of services can be found in Switzerland, Belgium, France, Norway, Spain, Greece, Luxembourg, and the third category occurs in countries like Portugal, Italy, Ireland or United Kingdom.

In Germany, according to the legislation on immigration, new immigrants have the legal right to benefit from integration measures, such as language courses and cultural orientation. The cultural orientation sessions offered information about the legal system, culture and history of the country. In Germany, immigrants must make a financial contribution to the costs of the integration program, but only according to their own possibilities, and if they do not follow the program, this can have negative consequences on the renewal of the residence permit. Going through the integration program ends with the granting of a certificate, and it can serve to shorten the period for obtaining citizenship [7].

In other Member States, even if the legislation does not provide a special framework for national programs aiming at the integration of immigrants, efforts were nevertheless undertaken to develop a national policy to promote their integration. For example, in Sweden, where there are no programs on integration of refugees similar to those existing in Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands, the Government decided in 1997 to pay more attention to such policies. Thus, each immigrant is granted equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

United Kingdom has a long tradition as a country welcoming immigrants. Here, in parallel with policies relating to immigration, they have developed legal instruments and norms which mainly promote racial equality and equal opportunities in different domains. They directly affect the lives of immigrants and their descendants. Level of employment, education, provision of housing and social services are the most representative in this regard.

A similar situation to that of the United Kingdom can be found in Ireland, where the measures have targeted mainly in the labor market. Almost all immigrants had a job offer [8].

In Spain, in the period of 2001-2004, it has been put in place a national plan, the Global Immigration Program, aimed at the integration of immigrants. This program has identified several key areas, namely: ensuring the exercise of the rights of immigrants (health care, access to education, family reunification, religious freedom), access to citizenship, access to the labor market, temporary housing, as well as improving the general framework on integration, through the building of mechanisms for improving dialogue between authorities at national, regional and local level, non-governmental organizations and the civil society and for combating racism and xenophobia. In order to support the efforts made at the national level with regard to the phenomenon of integration, a number of regional authorities are endowed with the task to implement programs for immigrants, including measures aimed at their successful integration [9].

In Portugal, the integration measures have been undertaken through the establishment of the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities. It has the responsibility to develop social policies for the betterment of integration of immigrants in Portugal. In addition, efforts were deployed in order to improve the process of informing the newcomers, through NGOs

which, in Portugal, have a major role in the integration and which runs a significant number of projects for helping immigrants [10].

In implementing national policies aiming at the integration of immigrants, Italy is championing, with the support of civil society and NGOs, many policies which provide social welfare services, as well as housing. Their projects at the national, local and regional level, are receiving financial support from the Government.

Luxembourg has, since 1993, a law on the integration of foreigners. It sets up necessary the programs for dealing with the social, economic and cultural needs of immigrants. The proportion of foreigners in Luxembourg is far greater than in other EU countries. The country has three official languages and with respect to foreign children, they represent 38% of the total school population. Considering these aspects, policies are based on principles such as: joint education, the use of the three common languages in equal measure and equal opportunities.

In Austria immigrants are required to enter into and comply with an agreement with the authorities, whose failure has negative consequences upon renewal of the permit of residence. Immigrants should participate in the program of integration and to bear the costs. If the immigrant manages to go through the program during the period of 18 months, as set forth in the agreement, the Government reimburses up to 50% of the of integration program costs [11].

With regard to Greece, in the period of 2003-2006, it began to implement as part of the national policy on migration, a National Integration Plan, which aims at the social integration of all immigrants legally resident. This plan covers different measures in areas such as information, labor market (creation of a mechanism for the registration of professional skills of immigrants), culture and language, education, health services and temporary housing [12].

In Romania, the policy on the social integration of immigrants is embodied in *The National Strategy on Migration* [13]. During the period of 1991-2005, in Romania were registered a number of 14 854 asylum-seekers, of whom 2 577 received some form of protection. In May 2005, according to the data provided by the National Office for Refugees, there were in Romania 858 foreigners, with some form of protection. The Romanian integration programs target group of immigrants, only refugees. Refugee integration policy aims at supporting them to sustain themselves, to become independent of the State, of the assistance of non-governmental organizations, and to participate actively in the Romanian society, in terms of economic, social and cultural values [14]. In Romania the National Office for Refugees operates within the Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs, which plays the role of coordinator of the institutions involved in the field of social integration of refugees and which also has the responsibility to monitor individual cases, both during and after the integration of the refugee in the local community. In addition, the National Office for Refugees assists distressed refugees point, especially through counseling services and conducts information campaigns for the population of Romania with respect to refugees [15].

3. Media and intercultural education

The media influence the public perception of immigrants. They often portray immigrants in stereotypical roles or include them among the protagonists of journalistic materials which do not actually refer to them. There are also situations where the media present some cases (single event) instead of a thematic presentation and they do not bother to show the context and descriptions needed to enhance understanding and empathy about issues related to immigrants. How the media deal with issues of migration and integration ranges from compassion to active support and from casual and unintentional

prejudices to xenophobia [16]. The manner in which immigrants are portrayed and represented in the media does not always accurately reflect their reality [17].

One of the fundamental roles of the media is intercultural education and, consequently, they must take into account different life styles, adapt to the needs and interests of everyone but also to develop and configure their output on the principle of equal participation of all those involved in the educational process. To this end, there should be places in which immigrants and people of different cultures would be able to get involved [18].

Intercultural education must meet the needs, interests and motivation of participants in the educational process in order to overcome social inequalities. In this respect, the education act must be based on two fundamental principles, namely: respect for differences and the promotion of equality. Since European societies are becoming increasingly more diversified culturally and linguistically, as a result of immigration, the media play an important role in that it is a powerful tool to educate, to influence the attitudes of the society and to provide accurate information to the public, regarding the communities of immigrants and how their integration within a society is being dealt with by all those concerned.

4. Conclusions

This study problematizes tackles the special requirements of migrants and their integration in different social and cultural contexts. Legal immigration is a long-debated issue at the EU level, the social integration of foreigners in the host societies representing the core of public policies in the field of immigration. Knowledge, the promotion of fundamental rights to non-discrimination and equal opportunities for immigrants are extremely important aspects for integrating foreign nationals and for the joint efforts made on the part of both immigrants and the local population to build open societies, equally responsible and diverse. In this regard, the governments of nations, taking into consideration the tensions between economic pressures to exploit migrants, and the need to protect their rights in the context of ensuring social cohesion, must play an important role in regulating the migration phenomenon. Thus, policies and practices in the field of migration can be viable and effective only if they are based on a solid set of legal norms and only if they are operating according to the principle of the rule of law. Only in this way can they provide a framework for legislation, national policies and practices, as well as for co-operation within States and between States with regard to the migration process.

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