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IMPROVING US AND EU IMMIGRATION SYSTEMS

Developing Cohesive and Integrated Societies in the EU and in the US: The added value of a Transatlantic Local Integration and Cohesion Forum

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**Improving EU and US Immigration Systems' Capacity for Responding to Global
Challenges: Learning from experiences**

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The added value of a Transatlantic Local Integration and Cohesion Forum**

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Improving EU and US Immigration Systems' Capacity for Responding to Global Challenges: Learning from experiences

The project is co-funded by the European Commission in the framework of the Pilot Projects on “Transatlantic Methods for Handling Global Challenges in the European Union and United States”. The project is directed at the Migration Policy Center (MPC – Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies – European University Institute, Florence) by Philippe Fargues, director of the MPC, and Demetrios Papademetriou president of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) the partner institution.

The rationale for this project is to identify the ways in which EU and US immigration systems can be substantially improved in order to address the major challenges policymakers face on both sides of the Atlantic, both in the context of the current economic crisis, and in the longer term.

Ultimately, it is expected that the project will contribute to a more evidence-based and thoughtful approach to immigration policy on both sides of the Atlantic, and improve policymakers’ understanding of the opportunities for and benefits of more effective Transatlantic cooperation on migration issues.

The project is mainly a comparative project focusing on 8 different challenges that policymakers face on both sides of the Atlantic: employment, social cohesion, development, demographic, security, economic growth and prosperity, and human rights.

For each of these challenges two different researches will be prepared: one dealing with the US, and the other concerning the EU. Besides these major challenges some specific case studies will be also tackled (for example, the analysis of specific migratory corridor, the integration process faced by specific community in the EU and in the US, the issue of crime among migrants etc.).

Against this background, the project will critically address policy responses to the economic crisis and to the longer-term challenges identified. Recommendations on what can and should be done to improve the policy response to short-, medium- and long term challenges will follow from the research. This will include an assessment of the impact of what has been done, and the likely impact of what can be done.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the websites of the project:

- <http://www.eui.eu/Projects/TransatlanticProject/Home.aspx/>
- <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/immigrationsystems/>

For more information:

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Introduction

Until recently, public debates about the integration of immigrants and integration policies took place almost exclusively at the national and at the local levels. Over time, each country developed its own official discourse about the position immigrants should enjoy in the host society and its own policy tools to reach that objective. In other words, each country had defined its own model of integration (Martiniello 2011), its own “philosophy of integration” (Favell 1997), through an inward looking process without discussing and cooperating with other countries. Deciding who was supposed to be integrated, how, to what extent and in which domains has been considered to be a core and exclusive prerogative of the state and a key element of sovereignty. Models of integration are normative constructs, ideologies of the ideal nation. Therefore, the idea of exchanging information and cooperating with other states to define or adjust national models of integration and national integration policies was looked at with suspicion by most states. Allowing foreign interlocutors to have a say in how each society defines the ideal nation has for a long time been seen as equally unacceptable.

As a consequence, a variety of different national models of integration have flourished around the world. Scholars have constructed different typologies of these models that, beyond their many specificities, seem to share a common feature: the presence of immigrants and the process of integration in the new society are supposed to be problematic, either because they would not necessarily have the economic, social and educational resources to fit smoothly into their new environment or because their culture and religion would be different from the mainstream culture and religion of the host society. Clearly this view is overly simplistic because it ends up homogenizing immigrants and integration processes and because it creates a sharp distinction between non-immigrants and immigrants, between “us” and “them”. Furthermore, this view implies that immigrants should make the first and most important efforts to integrate since they are responsible for their “problems” of integration. This approach to immigrant integration in terms of problems is in itself though problematic. Immigrants are never a homogenous group and empirical research documents several integration trajectories, from the smoothest ones to the most difficult ones. Besides, one could argue that countries that explicitly or implicitly attract immigrants should also take the first initiative in encouraging and facilitating their integration. This is not the place to discuss further these sensitive issues concerning the integration process in receiving societies, issues that are also relevant at the supranational level.

As a matter of fact, the debates on immigrant integration have lately become increasingly supranational even though the actual policies remain largely national and subnational. In Europe, the European Commission has played a major role in promoting a European debate on integration with a view to achieving some convergence in integration policies in the future, though this can hardly be described as a truly common EU integration policy. Mainly, soft law and substantial funding through the European Integration Fund have been used to build up a European perspective on immigrant integration; many other international organisations now contribute to the debate as well.

Some form of transatlantic policy debate has also been launched in the past decade. A pivotal actor in this process has been the Migration Policy Institute. It played a central role in the establishment of Metropolis International and also in the OECD project “Gaining from Migration” just to mention two initiatives in which it was involved. However, transatlantic discussions have been more productive on the issue of the management of migration flows than on questions relations to integration. The old idea that the differences between traditional countries of immigration, like the US, and newer countries of immigration, like most EU states are too great to allow for comparison and reciprocal learning in policies is still very much with us.

This paper argues against that point of view by raising the following questions: Can we compare the EU and the US experiences in terms of migration and integration? Can we improve the transatlantic dialogue on integration policies and what would the added value be for both parties? The

paper is divided into three parts. The first part summarizes the main differences and similarities between European and US societies which should be taken into account when trying to promote a transatlantic dialogue on integration policies. The second part stresses the commonalities between the immigrant integration processes in both regions of the world. The third part proposes a way to improve transatlantic dialogue on integration and cohesion through the creation of a Transatlantic Local Integration Forum.

I. Differences and Similarities between the EU and the US

There are certainly many differences between the US and the EU that need to be taken into account when discussing a better policy dialogue on immigrant cohesion and integration between these two parts of the world. First, Americans consider themselves to be a “nation of immigrants”, while the EU is a relatively young *sui generis* political construction adequately described by Wiener (2008) as a “non-state” composed of at least 27 nations, whose construction was completed before the big immigration waves. This difference is crucial because it frames the context in which integration happens. In the US, immigration is part of national history. It is at the core of the construction of the American nation even though there is a recurrent debate about the contribution of migration to society and about the necessity of attracting migrants in the future. Compare this with most EU countries where immigration is considered an unwanted or unplanned addition to national societies constituted long before the arrival of migrants. In the US much more than in the EU, immigrants are considered to be citizens in the making, access to citizenship being the logical end of the migratory career.

Second, the US was – to put it in a simple and superficial way – a European colony for many years, whereas several member states of the EU were colonial or even imperial powers until the second half of the twentieth century. These different colonial and post-colonial experiences are related to current debates on immigrant integration and management of diversity. In particular, political participation and representation of minority groups in both societies is dealt with in different fashions, in part a question of different colonial traditions. In some European countries, “savoir-faire” in managing relations with colonized peoples was transferred to the metropolis to manage relations with immigrants.

Third, despite the many efforts undertaken on both sides of the Atlantic in terms of legislation and policies, ethnic and racial discrimination have persisted in both societies. However, there is nothing comparable to the historical American divide between blacks and whites in the EU. The legacy of slavery and racial segregation remains tangible in the US and it remains relevant in understanding the debates over the integration of immigrants even in the Obama era.

Fourth, the place of religion in society and politics remains quite different in the US and in the EU. In the US, asserting a religious identity and displaying religious convictions in public is considered to be normal and not necessarily problematic. It is no surprise in the “Nation under God”. Furthermore, the US has a long tradition of protecting religious minorities. On the contrary, in several EU countries where the secularisation process was particularly powerful, the public expression of faith causes controversy even though the individual right to a religion is guaranteed. The principle of a sharp separation of politics from religion is not understood in the same way as in the US and the idea according to which the public arena should be “religion-free” remains potent. This difference is crucial in understanding the different ways in which both societies respond to religious claims made by immigrant communities.

Fifth, in general terms, there are huge differences between welfare provisions and the social security systems in the US and in the EU even though a process of relative convergence has probably started. In some EU countries, unemployment benefits are provided indefinitely. Access to health services is easier and cheaper than in the US. The same holds for access to education from pre-school to university. This difference has an impact both on the economic integration of immigrants and also

on the attitude of the local populations towards immigrants. In the EU more than in the US, immigrants are often unfairly accused of taking advantage of the welfare system.

Sixth, the question of national unity is not really relevant in the American context. Apart from some very marginal political groups, nobody seriously questions the unity of the state. It is of major concern in several EU member states such as Belgium, Italy, and Spain and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. Autonomous, regionalist, separatist and nationalist movements challenge either the European integration process or national unity at the highest levels of political institutions. Belgium is probably the most notable example in that respect. The longstanding dispute between French-speaking and Flemish-speaking Belgians is far from being settled and it jeopardizes the permanence of the state that hosts the capital city of the EU. Seeking integration in a disunited society or in a society characterized by a relatively strong national identity is certainly not the same.

This list of differences between the US and the EU is not exhaustive. However, it is obvious that they have an impact on the immigrant integration process, in terms of the opportunities for developing policies and in the public debates on immigration and integration. But beyond this, there are also similarities between the two societies that call for a dialogue between them. Both the US and the EU are magnets for millions of potential immigrants from different geographical regions. Immigration from Latin America is stronger in the US and immigration from Africa is more important in the EU. But migration patterns and routes are increasingly diversified and despite economic, financial and social crises, both societies continue to attract migrants year after year. Very little is expected to change in the future. As a consequence, both the US and the EU are *de facto* multicultural, multiracial, multi-ethnic and multi-faith societies. The US has entered a process of diversification of its diversity (Hollinger 1995) while the EU has stepped into “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007) even though the configuration of diversity is different in each case. Both in US and in EU cities similar contradictory trends can be observed. On the one hand, ethnic, racial and religious separation and segregation are a reality. But, on the other, intercultural, interracial and interfaith exchanges are also developing. Trends towards fragmentation and trends towards cohesion and integration develop in parallel, even if the economic crisis favours the former more. The growth of economic inequalities is another common feature of both societies. Poverty, exclusion and marginalization are on the rise and they affect immigrants, ethnic minorities and majorities differently. One thing is sure; when economic inequalities and ethnic divisions overlap, the risk for ethnicized social conflicts is much higher.

Beyond differences and similarities, the US and the EU seem to face the same old challenges: how to integrate an increasingly diverse society shaped by migration? How to combine the respect for diversity with social and economic cohesion? The issue of the integration of immigrants is part of this broad challenge by which both societies need to rethink their democratic pluralism. They, therefore, would both gain by learning from each other how to respond to the same questions in different contexts.

II. The Process of Integration in the EU and in the US

Since “integration” is a disputed concept on both sides of the Atlantic, it might be useful to define integration in concrete terms of the **fair participation** of target individuals and groups in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres of the host European and American societies. From this perspective, a satisfactory level of immigrant integration is achieved when immigrants have similar participation patterns compared to non-immigrant citizens. Concretely, it means, for example, similar labour-market participation (economic dimension), similar electoral turnout patterns (political dimensions), similar attitudes towards fundamental democratic values (cultural dimension) and similar access to social goods (social dimension).

Some degree of integration always takes place, even without integration policies. Integration policies sometimes produce unintended effects. For example, the introduction of compulsory and costly integration programmes for newcomers may result in keeping newcomers at the margins of

society for economic reasons. Those newcomers who do not possess the sufficient resources to pay for these programmes may decide not to register or they may choose alternative modes of living in the new society.

A certain degree of social, economic, cultural and political integration of immigrants and their offspring always takes place in any immigrant society. In policy terms, it would be useful to make a distinction between the initial phase of the integration process and the following steps. I propose calling the first step of the integration process, “adaptation”. “Adaption” refers to the insertion of newcomers into society in the first five years after arrival. During that period, the immigrant learns at least some basics of the language of the new country, how the society works in practice, how to gain access to housing, schools, the health-care system, the labour market, etc. After that period of initial settlement, the migrant continues her/his path and may encounter various difficulties and obstacles in the process of participation in the various spheres of society.

The description of the integration process from arrival onwards is difficult. There is a widely acknowledged lack of comparable statistics on immigrant integration in the European Union, but the Commission is trying to tackle this problem. However, it will take some time before we get solid and up-to-date statistical data on the integration of immigrants in all spheres of activities and in all the member states of the European Union. The problem is much more serious when trying to compare the integration process of the EU with that of the US.

Besides quantitative accounts, qualitative accounts of the integration process are also very important if we are to have a clear understanding of what type of integration develops, where, when and for which group(s) of migrants. Generally, qualitative accounts and studies are neglected because the data provided are not easily presentable in tables and percentages. However, statistics and surveys often lack the depth of qualitative research. The two approaches should be seen as complementary. Special emphasis should be put on the differentiated effects of policies in different settings and on different migrant populations. This would help us understand why the same policy instrument produces different results in different places and for different groups.

Integration does not take place at the same speed in the sphere of culture, politics, society and economy. For example, excellent labour-market integration can coexist with very bad social and political integration. The case of Japanese expatriate communities in major European cities is a good illustration of the differentiation in the integration process. Usually, they enjoy a privileged position in terms of employment and wages (the Japanese in Brussels, to take but one example). But they typically do not take part in local social and political life and they do not participate in local cultural life. To a lesser extent, the same could be said of many European civil servants and experts living in Belgium. Their job situation is valued. They share in European culture and values, but they participate very little in the social and political life of Brussels and Belgium.

Differentiation in the integration process is certainly a challenge if one is to provide a detailed empirical account of integration. It raises the question not of **WHAT** integration is, but of **WHEN** integration is. It might be said that ideally immigrants reach integration when they participate, at least to some extent, socially, economically, culturally and politically in the host society. This approach would also allow not only comparisons of immigrants’ groups and individuals, but also of immigrants with the local population as far as integration is concerned. Clearly, not all local citizens are ideally integrated and sometimes immigrants are even better integrated than these locals.

The role of culture, ethnicity, race and religion in integration is another difficult though crucial and hence unavoidable issue. On the one hand, “culturalist” approaches explain deficiencies in immigrant integration by referring to the cultural background of immigrants. When immigrants are economically, socially or politically disadvantaged, their cultural specificity or difference is presented as the major explanation. On the other hand, “structural” approaches explain the lack of integration by macro economic and political factors such as globalization or ethnic discrimination. This debate is clearly far from being settled.

However, it seems indisputable that social links rooted in culture, ethnicity, race and religion can also play a positive role both in the first step (adaptation) and in the subsequent steps of the integration (or participation) process. Let us take the example of the Senegalese Mourides immigrants present in several European countries. For the Senegalese Mourides coming to Europe or the US, the Mourides religious confraternities found in European and American cities play an important role in helping them to find accommodation, to find jobs and to find their way around their new society. This specific instance clearly shows how a religious organisation can help the economic and social adaptation of immigrants.

More generally, this example also reminds us that immigrants do not wait for the implementation of integration policies to start the process of integration, especially in the economic and social sphere. Historically, cultural, ethnic, racial, religious and national communities have always played a role in fostering the adaptation and participation of immigrants in the new society. Italians arriving in New York at the turn of the twentieth century knew that by going to Mulberry Street they would find help among the *paesani* already settled there, help to get a job and accommodation. Poles arriving today in Brussels go directly to Saint-Gilles. They know that help will be available at the Polish Church. Such examples could, of course, be multiplied many times over. They are as much about informal networks as formal associations formed by migrants and, sometimes, their supporters.

But there is another side to the coin. Intra-ethnic exploitation is also historically common in places of immigration. The Chinese case consisting of the exploitation of irregular Chinese workers by Chinese restaurant owners is now well-documented. It is certainly not the only instance of intra-community exploitation. Solidarity and exploitation in immigrant groups often develop simultaneously.

After September 11, 2001, a question has very often been asked more or less explicitly in the integration debates both in the US and in Europe: is there something unique in the Muslim immigrant experience? Do Muslim immigrants integrate differently than other migrants? What is the impact of “securitization” and anti-terrorism on the integration of Muslim immigrants? A common though disputed view today is that Islam is an obstacle to integration. Obviously, these questions and this view would need further development. Let us just mention three points here:

- Muslim immigrants should not be homogenized and considered as a single monolithic group. Muslim immigrants are divided along theological, social, economic, political, national and ethnic lines. These divisions explain the variety of mosques and places of prayer in Europe and also in the US. Therefore, it seems erroneous to claim that Islam generally is a barrier to integration and participation.
- Some Muslim immigrants are close to the ideal integration or fair participation in the four spheres of human activity (social, economic, cultural and political), while others fall short in their attempt to find a valuable place in European society.
- “Securitization” and anti-terrorism policies, to the extent that they target Muslims and encourage anti-Muslim discrimination, have a negative impact on the integration of Muslim immigrants, particularly on those who lack the social, economic, political and educational resources to compete in the European economy.

The integration process first empirically develops locally and, therefore, it varies from one region of the European Union to another, from one American city to another. Let us briefly examine the economic, social, political and cultural spheres in that order.

- The economic integration of immigrants largely depends on the structure of the local and regional labour markets. These specificities have to be taken into account when trying to assess the economic integration of immigrants. Finding a stable and well-paid job is a major challenge for any job seeker and, therefore, also for migrants in regions struck by higher unemployment than in rapidly developing countries. Consequently, these regional disparities should be taken into account when assessing immigrants’ economic integration. A same rate

of unemployment for an immigrant group, say, for example, 15 percent, would be considered as an excellent performance in a European region where general unemployment reaches 25 percent. It would be considered as a bad performance in regions where the general unemployment rate does not exceed six percent.

- Immigrants' social participation is similarly linked to the local characteristics of the social fabric. It is easier for immigrants to socially fit where there is a dense network of associations rather than in places where the social link is not as strong. In a study done in Belgium, the importance of schools for the social integration of immigrants has been evidenced. Through their children attending schools, new immigrants and asylum seekers get to meet other parents and this opens a door into the local community (Gsir, Scandella, Martiniello and Rea 2004)
- Politically, immigrants will find it easier to participate, all other things being equal (i.e. political rights), in regions where there is general strong political participation rather than in regions characterized by political apathy.
- At the cultural level, immigrants do not generally endorse an abstract cultural "model". They participate in European or American culture through their participation in the local version of that European or American culture. Cultural participation develops through social interactions between immigrants and the local populations in daily life.

The legal status of the incoming migrant has a strong impact on the process of integration (or participation). Migrants arriving with a work permit and a work contract have *de facto* solved the issue of economic integration. When though asylum seekers are legally prevented from working, they are barred from any economic integration and forced into the underground economy to find a job allowing themselves to survive. Do different "legally-defined migrants" follow different patterns of integration?

III. How to improve the transatlantic dialogue on integration and cohesion policies

Some form of transatlantic dialogue on integration and cohesion and related policies already exists. Networks such as Metropolis International and Cities of Migration operate in part in that area. But so far, these embryonic forms of dialogue have not really affected the debates, the policies and the local practices in either US or in European cities. It is hereby proposed to create a **Transatlantic Local Integration and Cohesion Forum** to fill this gap.

The first main idea behind the **Transatlantic Local Integration and Cohesion Forum** is that the process of immigrant integration and changes in social cohesion mainly occur at the local level (city, neighbourhood). Therefore, integration policies should also develop and be implemented at the local level. Comparing national models of integration is useful but insufficient. The second main idea is that comparable US cities and EU cities would gain in exchanging knowledge about the integration dynamics and policies to improve their own record. Importing or exporting a national integration model is neither feasible nor desirable. The cooperation between local stakeholders over integration issues is more promising. The third idea is that field operators are better positioned to come up with policy options or other ways to improve social cohesion than the "distant observers" usually found in global discussions. The fourth idea is that all local stakeholders should get together to bring about more efficient integration policies and initiatives. In practice, this means universities, politicians, policy-makers, media, civil society organisations, NGOs, immigrant associations, employers, trade unions, urban planners, etc.

With these background ideas, the objectives of this **Transatlantic Local Integration and Cohesion Forum** would be:

- To promote the transfer of academic knowledge on integration and cohesion between participating comparable cities in terms of size and economic structure.
- To promote the transfer of policy tools on integration and cohesion.

- To develop quantitative and qualitative tools allowing for city-to-city comparisons on the evolution of integration and cohesion.
- To promote dialogue and exchange between immigrant organisations established in various cities.

To achieve these objectives, we propose to start by focussing on the following activities:

- First, the methodology would be to form clusters of comparable EU and US cities in terms of economic structures, size, and role of immigration in the city's development. The following activities would develop within these clusters of cities:
 - To organize field visits to the various cities for the stakeholders participating in the cluster.
 - To launch comparative research projects at the city clusters level on the various dimensions of integration (economic, social, political and cultural).
 - To organize policy workshops at the city clusters level on the various dimensions of integration (economic, social, political and cultural).
 - To build a website where all the results of the city clusters activities would be reported.
 - To organize a general conference of all the city clusters every two years alternating between the EU and the US.

At present this is only an idea to be discussed and explored not only in terms of the content of the initiative but also in terms of funding. This paper is a first attempt at contributing to the development of a transatlantic local expertise on integration and cohesion issues, which has heretofore been missing.

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