



Immigration: a resource for a Europe *united in diversity.*



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Abstract

This paper scrutinises the current phenomenon of the refugees' crisis, which is spreading all over Europe and it identifies several standpoints to look, at and to think about, this tragic issue. The paper focuses on the behaviour and attitudes shown by several Countries during the last few weeks, continuously changing the geopolitical orders of the EU, with particular reference to new emerging dynamics in the nearly annexed East and in a "guiltily" forgotten Mediterranean South. Starting from, and continuously referring to, President Juncker's last speech on the "State of the Union", the article shares and proposes the need to face and manage the issue of the refugees' crisis with a political approach that is considered as the key to cope with this crisis. The paper assumes that this is a typical *momentum* for the



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European Union: depending on its ability to act as internally united, the EU will demonstrate its capacity or incapacity to continue to effectively build the actual and deep Union. In other words, Europe is now facing a double crisis: the refugees' crisis and its internal unity crisis. Finally, the author proposes to focus on the Mediterranean, which should recover its centrality in the policies of Europe*.

* This article has been submitted on the 14th of September 2015

Overcoming permanence is an act that has always been inherent in human nature. The migrating of entire populations made it possible for anthropologists to retrace the roots of the historical and geographical evolution of mankind and its evolution.

Experts in cultural studies have tirelessly introduced the theorem of permanence as a feature that is not discernible in all cultures. Many are the intrinsic characteristics of the migration phenomenon, among these, two are the components that cannot be overlooked when analysing this complex and controversial topic:

firstly, immigration and migration phenomena always entail a human component, and secondly, immigration always involves effects and repercussions on society.

Firmly believing that immigration involves a human component is not just a rhetorical assumption: it keeps our attention focused on the dissertation “contents”, moreover, it raises several related issues such as, and most importantly, issues regarding protection of human rights, the topic of political asylum and the welfare system, without omitting all legal implications and the field of international law.

Secondly, and this is the area that interests me the most, the phenomenon of immigration has deep effects on the society that houses the immigrants, with a specular perspective. The immigration phenomena generate positive and negative dynamics: migration waves wreak cultural syncretism. The USA, i.e., represent a direct testimony of how diverse and diversified linguistic, ethnic and social families would have enriched the territorial social cultures by creating and institutionalising a miscellanea of subcultures that can boost the immaterial culture legacy. Indeed, when a minority, resulting from an immigration wave, is institutionalised, the institutionalised society and its culture could benefit from the innovations brought by the immigrants.

In truth, even Europe and its cities have taken advantage of these dynamics for a very long time. I am referring to the architecture of the European city: it proudly shows its stratifications and layering that narrate multiple styles brought to the city by the

migration and immigration, which led to an empowerment of the city’s material heritage. With reference to the immaterial legacy, migration streams bring additional enriching elements, especially in the field of traditions and language. For example, in London, a thick range of linguistic and cultural innovations could be detected, which make the English language richer. Moreover, the phenomenology of immigration is strictly linked to the national stories, as proof of its so accentuated cultural component. Undeniably, immigration routes follow the ancient colonisation ones, as if deep navigation canals were traced among continents and continuously reutilised as immigration’s routes. Consequently, French speaking North Africa would be more attracted to France, whilst Egypt and India will be more inclined to retrace the ancient ways which connected them with London in the past.

Nevertheless, immigration could cause several problems: the latter could trigger unrestrained and often politically exploited phenomena, which are usually ascribed to NIMBY syndrome and then exacerbated by the political debate. Meanwhile, objective problems are detected within immigration phenomena, such as the numerous sanitarian emergencies and bad management that could lead to actual idiosyncrasies (as in the recent case of immigrants settlement in the hotels of the central-northern Italian Riviera), which contribute to the creation of a fairly high radicalisation of the problem.

This combination of negative problems marginalises and/or darkens the positive features and it is not a surprise that Denmark chose to publish a letter of discouragement for the immigration phenomenon on Lebanese newspapers.

Immigration emergency is a field where the frontier territories’ contradictions become even more radical. An example is represented by the southern coasts of Italy, which are collapsing under the weight of this phenomenon, even more tragic and unsustainable, despite the incomparable efforts of humanitarian aiders. This situation

results in the worsening of the attitudes against immigration and in the strengthening of a European image, which is far from the coasts and abandons its most peripheral territories. In the meantime, mass media exploits the phenomenon, often brutally, by following the audience reasons and criteria that lay on the debatable limits of freedom of information and expression, and by increasing and amplifying the preoccupation of the public opinion on the phenomenon. It is not a coincidence that migration is attested as the European citizens' first preoccupation and it is woven with terrorism and political violence. Usually, as in a non-totally justified semantic synthesis, these two concerns seem to proceed in parallel and on the same

level, dangerously inclined¹.

More in particular, migration routes continue to perturb geopolitical orders on which Europe has tried to found its foreign policy. European integration scholars have already demonstrated that, during the period of massive enlargement of the EU towards the East, Europe's barycentre has been moved consequently towards East, probably following the logics of geo-economic convenience. But, this licit attention towards and beyond the Balkans has not been adequately counterbalanced by a focalisation on the Mediterranean's

1 Eurobarometer Standard n. 83 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_first_en.pdf p. 14



resources. The basin of “*Mare Nostrum*” owns an unexpressed potential, which has not been wisely managed because it has been “darkened” by the geopolitical priorities coming from the East. Now, as an already deflagrated bomb, the Mediterranean’s role on the international and European theatre has vehemently imposed itself; the tragic effects, which were deadened in the past, have strongly and vigorously summoned Brussels’ attention with their whole devastating dramatic nature.

It is clear that it is not possible to address the topic by following a national approach because the migration phenomenon is objectively complex and a national perspective is no longer enough. Italy, together with Greece and Malta first and then with Hungary, are surely more exposed to the phenomenon, but the problem, as well as the approach, should be global and, above all, political.

In fact, these prerogatives are recalled in the recent speech by President Juncker on the “State of the Union”² held on the 9th of September in Strasburg, that has underlined, on the proscenium of the speech, the refugees’ crisis, reiterating the political nature of the Commission.

Referring to this last concept, surely the immigration phenomenon presents wide social, economic, geographical and cultural aspects, but it is mainly a purely political issue and so it cannot be treated with a technical or technocratic approach. These kinds of methods can be effective for economy but they cannot be used while dealing with a complex and epochal dramatic phenomena as immigration/emigration and political refugees.

Exploiting a political approach means to brave the complexity of the refugee’s world without being scared by what can be found; only a political approach takes into account the diverse variables which compose this phenomenon. Political approach means to strive into a «*historical fairness*» operation, as Juncker has specified in his speech on the “State of the Union”:

«We Europeans should remember well that Europe is a continent where nearly everyone has at one time been a refugee. Our common history is marked by millions of Europeans fleeing from religious or political persecution, from war, dictatorship, or oppression».

So, far from a mere institutional approach, the political one entices considerations which find their roots in a common history that cannot be blind to its past and that rests on its laurels of wellbeing to which, despite the crisis, Europe is still anchored; in this European past, those who are affected by the NIMBY syndrome, are the same peoples who have been migrant and refugee due to killings that have shocked Europe during the years.

Therefore, this refugees’ crisis is an opportunity for Europe to recover its most human face and its capacity to act as a unique social and political body on the international scene, going beyond the internal incomprehension and the many delays in the elaboration of the European project. This is a central moment because it could represent the symptom of the actual presence or absence of a real union among the Member States. Besides economic and technical debates, besides the cold economics made by data and competitions among the States, besides the incomprehension between the Countries and far from the political exploitations and the related easy-to-understand rhetoric, the refugees’ crisis is a resource for Europe and it could represent a *momentum* of actual unity which is essential to revive the currently foggy process of the European unity construction. European law technicalities can wait because if there is a lack of political and jointly responsible commitment, they are destined to fail. It could be argued that, the East owns a grave responsibility referring to the European frontiers’ closure to refugees. Europe has always demonstrated its trust in the East, in the Balkans, by approaching Moscow through accurate and designed policies. This topic had deep political symbologies, too. Indeed, as well as Greece’s entrance

² http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5614_en.htm

into the Union (considered by some too premature) was mainly dictated by the inconceivability to build the European dream without the democracy's cradle (whose myth of Europa named the Continent), during the first decennium of 2000, Europe decided to become the engine that would have slowly driven the ex-soviet Countries' block far from the planned economy and towards a clearly western democracy, rule of law and market. But, even if this operation has been carried out, inner cultural roots within the eastern Countries are difficult to eradicate and so, maybe, these reminiscences could have generated a common hostile attitude by the European East towards the immigrants issue, even if with the due gradations. Europe has set its own sights on the East, which has proven to be quite unreliable, whilst the Mediterranean, which has been so

guiltily disregarded and forgotten, shows its own tragedy and reaffirms its great potential in terms of development, integration and cohesion among the peoples.

The idea of Europe itself risks to decay. As President Juncker has said in his speech on the "State of the Union",

«Europe is the baker in Kos who gives away his bread to hungry and weary souls. Europe is the students in Munich and in Passau who bring clothes for the new arrivals at the train station. Europe is the policeman in Austria who welcomes exhausted refugees upon crossing the border. This is the Europe I want to live in».

Nevertheless, coordination problems and political dynamics are now modifying the European structure. Let's think about the



Migranti a Lampedusa - © European Union, 2015 / Photo: Laporta Mario - Audiovisual Service

German attitude: Germany has decided to suspend the treaty of Dublin and to develop a precise pro-immigration policy. From a media standpoint, the German Chancellor has surely wiped out the image and the heritage of an insensitive and authoritarian Germany, as labelled during the Greece affair³, and now the Country seems to be driving Europe again, while interpreting a new and positive role. Tendentious interpretations have highlighted the economic returns on this operation. Nevertheless, after yet another shipwreck with 39 victims and an escalation of immigrants that have put the logistic and the economic system of German cities, firstly Munich, to the test, Germany has been forced to take a step back, temporarily suspending Schengen⁴, with the approval of the same Juncker. This decision highlights the unsustainability of the European situation, characterised by an “escape from responsibility” attitude. The new European scheme presents a block of Countries, such as Hungary, which exploits the German “open doors” to ignore and solve the issue. The Scandinavian voices, and Sweden’s in particular, come together with the German calls for an equal repartition of refugees and immigrants streams. As a matter of fact, internal dreads are spreading within Germany and could bring the compact front of Angela Merkel to implode causing a consequent political crisis that no one in Germany, as well as in Europe would be able to handle.

Above any ideology, there is a need to shine a light on this issue’s proportions. The phenomenon of immigration and political refugees has involved, according to several data, like those reported by the same Juncker in his speech, circa 500.000 peoples starting from the beginning of the year, but these data should be contextualised; indeed, as Juncker stated:

«There is certainly an important and unprecedented number of refugees coming

3 I am referring to the events about the potential “Grexit”.

4 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URISERV:l33020&from=EN>

to Europe at the moment. However, they still represent just 0.11% of the total EU population. In Lebanon, refugees represent 25% of the population. And this in a country where people have only one fifth of the wealth we enjoy in the European Union».

Dealing with the immigration phenomenon as an economic issue does not mean to devalue the problem or to abandon the needed political optic. An example could be the German attitude towards the Syrian people. The great potentialities of the integration within the German economy come from the certain presence of potential among the migrants who are treated as a resource, especially politically speaking. The impressive German productive system, together with the social economic one, could become the outlet of immigration: an immigrant with a potential could cover job positions that allow a better integration within the social and economic environment, because finding a job and paying taxes, would allow to contribute to the system with a consequent decrease of social deviance and an increase of the integration and cohesion indexes. Thus, economy penetrates within the political discourse, not vice versa. Indeed, if immigration surely shines a light on the European continent’s efforts, with consequent positive repercussions on the EU’s image in the international scene, this same light could also drive negativity due to Europe’s unquestionable lack of internal unity which finds its litmus in the current nonexistence of a unique and united management of this crisis. Europe seems to be crumbling under the slow internal earth tremors, which create a bi-partition: Germany, with other EU Countries such as Italy, France and Greece on one side, and Hungary, Slovakia and United Kingdom on the other.

The UK and Germany stay on opposite sides. The UK is also facing internal problems. The relationship between UK and EU has always been tricky and adversarial: the Commonwealth system and the historically verified relationships with the United States, have always projected the UK towards the Atlantic Ocean; the rejection of the Euro has

confirmed its position as “out-of-team”; its alienation from EU affairs is not justified by a new version of the “splendid isolation” which does not exist and the UK continues to be chronically eurosceptic. On the internal side, Great Britain is continuously harmed by nationalist movements, mainly from Scotland, that endlessly jeopardise the decaying of a State which is closer to the United States and to the ancient colonial routes. Moreover, beyond the current refugees’ crisis, Great Britain has always been forced to deal with the qualified and unqualified immigration phenomenon, mostly by itself: a massive number of human resources go to the UK to work in enterprises from all over the world, to study in the excellent British universities and to operate in one of the most important financial places in the world. In this situation, a negative response by Cameron could be understandable, especially because he is constantly pressured by nationalist fronts

and the regularly committed to political juggling activities that are not always easy. By the way, a joint response is needed because of two reasons: first of all, if Europe would fail in building a united management of the refugees’ crisis, an unusually deep political and social fracture would be generated and this would affect both the economic and political sides of the EU; secondly, by failing, Europe would newly demonstrate how the European dream of building a federalist Union would disappear. Europe, all of Europe, should comprehend how the refugees’ crisis is an opportunity. The demographic decrease and the lack of human resources would be relieved: quality immigration, training for human resources for enterprises and sectors that continuously languish could transform the immigration from a problem to a potential resource to exploit in a competitive way. Syncretic phenomena and cross-fertilisations among



Immagine dal sito http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/soteu/index_en.htm



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diverse cultures would allow the European societies to enrich their own cultural legacy in order to face globalisation's challenges. But, above all, the European Union would demonstrate that its motto works, thanks to the introduction of new vital lymph into its culture, revealing its real and effective capacity to be a Europe *united in diversity*. The Mediterranean should be an absolute priority in the European cohesion and development policies. It should integrate all of those peoples who escape from conflicts and wars in the region, strengthening the tools and devices of cooperation and development and bringing better life conditions in the equatorial Africa (which is an actual source of desperate escape from hunger, poverty and from an endemic underdevelopment status). The far too easy and failing military adventures in the area have accentuated and made the crisis endemic rather than solving it, as in the case of Libya, roughly "freed" from Gheddafi and then consigned in the hands of a never ending war among tribes and warlords, with areas in the hands of the Islamic State. There is a need to adapt new immigration and integration policies for refugees, by considering them as a great resource to create a peaceful, multi-ethnic, multi-religious Europe, and by

investing on policies, plans and projects to create the conditions towards a permanent and sustainable development, which would respect local identities within the regions of the sub-Saharan, Saharan and equatorial Africa, starting points for great streams of immigrants who risk their life and belongings in deadly trips that are transforming the Mediterranean in an immense liquid cemetery.

Web sites

Eurobarometer Standard n. 83 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_first_en.pdf

"State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity"
by **Jean-Claude Juncker**
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