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November Roundtable: Multiculturalism and Integration Introduction

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November Roundtable: Multiculturalism and Integration Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

"Germany's Integration Blinkers. What's So Bad About Parallel Societies?" by Henryk M. Broder, Spiegel Online, November 20, 2010

and

"Angela Merkel: German Multiculturalism has Utterly Failed," by Matthew Weaver, The Guardian, October 17, 2010

Keywords

Human rights, Germany, Multiculturalism, Immigration, Religious diversity

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Multiculturalism and integration

Articles under review:

[“Germany's Integration Blinkers. What's So Bad About Parallel Societies?”](#) by Henryk M. Broder, Spiegel Online, November 20, 2010

[“Angela Merkel: German Multiculturalism has Utterly Failed,”](#) by Matthew Weaver, The Guardian, October 17, 2010

German Chancellor Angela Merkel made international headlines with her recent remarks that “multiculturalism has utterly failed.” Speaking to a meeting of young members of her Christian Democratic Union party, Merkel said the idea of people from different cultural backgrounds living happily “side by side” does not work in her country. The Chancellor’s statement created great debate since Germany recently has been immersed in an intense political controversy on multiculturalism and the question of whether or not there is a need to have a guiding national culture or “*Leitkultur*” when dealing with integration.

The article under review by Henryk M. Broder from the *SpiegelOnline* captures the extent of the debate through the following questions: “Why, then, does the term ‘parallel society’ have such a negative connotation in Germany? Why has multiculturalism ‘utterly failed?’ Why should people “with immigration backgrounds,” as Germans so carefully say, be forced to merge into the society of the majority if they would rather remain among themselves?” The article goes further by indicating that “ Only primitive societies that allow no differences of any kind, and dictatorships, which control all aspects of life, are free of parallel societies. Both the Third Reich and communist East Germany, for example, had no such thing. In flexible, changing populations, parallel societies are almost inevitable.”

These questions highlight an intense discussion about immigration policies in a country that is home to a great number of immigrants from Turkey, Russia, Poland, and other nations. In some cases the debate on multiculturalism has fostered discriminatory discourses against immigrants, particularly those of Muslim origin. Last week, Horst Seehofer, the Premier of Bavaria and a member of the Christian Social Union—part of Merkel's ruling coalition—[called for a halt to Turkish and Arab immigration](#). Recent polls published by *The Guardian* showed [one third of Germans believed the country was “overrun by foreigners.”](#) It also found [55 percent of Germans believed that Arabs are “unpleasant people,”](#) compared with the 44 percent who held the same opinion seven years ago.

Similar sentiments have been expressed in many Western countries, including Belgium, Sweden, and the Netherlands; in all of these places, anti-immigrant political parties made gains in recent elections. The United States is no exception to this tension, as demonstrated by the heated debate over Arizona’s new immigration law and the mosque-bashing at Ground Zero.

One of the biggest questions facing societies today continues to be how to respond to cultural and religious diversity. The backlash against multiculturalism, as expressed by Merkel’s statement, provides a new opportunity to re-examine the possible reasons behind the apparent

failure of some national integration policies. This month's panelists provide a wide array of perspectives on multiculturalism and integration through illustrative examples from Europe, Canada, and the United States.

These issues and others are considered in this month's Roundtable.