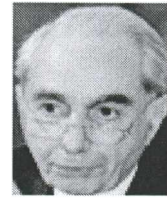# EUROPE

How and why Europe must embrace ethnic diversity

by Giuliano Amato

These are confusing times for Europeans as they grapple with the problems of ethnic and cultural diversity and their own demographic realities. Giuliano Amato, Italy's Interior Minister, advocates long-term strategies that EU countries should adopt

We Europeans tend to espouse either one or the other of two well-known doctrines when defining our attitudes to ethnic diversity. Some of us go for the "contact" theory, which has it that by living together different communities enrich each other by increasing their mutual understanding, and that this eventually leads to greater harmony between the respective groups. Others rally to the "conflict" theory, which predicts quite the opposite. These two theories obviously have opposite implications when it comes to immigration. The contact theory promotes open-doors policies and the use of all appropriate means to integrate immigrants into our communities while respecting their cultural identities. The conflict theory is advocated by those who urge as little immigration as possible, and who consequently support regulation and practice that will create as much hostility as possible towards the newcomers. It goes almost without saying that mainstream opinion in Europe, and thus political correctness, leans toward the former theory, while the latter reflects the widely despised anti-anti-discrimination visions of the radical right.

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Some recent studies in the US tell us how uncomfortable reality is, and how important it is for us to be aware of its inconvenient truths. The studies conducted independently of one other by social scientist Robert Putnam, political scientist Scott Page, economists Edward Glaeser and Alberto Alesina, and two other economists, Matthew Kahn and Dora Costa, have yielded strikingly similar results. According to Putnam, neither of these two main theories really applies. What actually takes place in more diverse communities is a "general civic malaise" in which fewer people volunteer, less money is given to charity and levels of trust are lower not only among different ethnic groups but also among members of the same group. In other words, less solidarity and more and more narrow identities. Khan and Costa confirm Putnam's conclusion, by adding evidence on school funding and other indicators, while Glaeser and Alesina write that something like half the difference in social welfare spending between Europe and the US may reflect America's greater ethnic diversity. This perhaps goes too far, but it is a fact that even we Europeans tend to limit welfare spending on immigrants until they have been granted full citizenship. One might argue that Putnam's findings do not mirror the conflict theory, although they may be closer to it than to the contact theory. Putnam's counter-argument might then be that that is not the only side to the story. The other, expounded by Putnam himself and by Page, is economic and concerns the greater productivity and the higher rates of innovation when the (mostly skilled) teams of workers from different cultures inter-acted. They found that instead of creating division and mistrust, their different ways of thinking promoted an innovative dynamic and therefore added up to a plus. It might only be a small plus in terms of quantity, but a very significant one when it came to quality.

Where should we go from here? If these data were to be considered final, it would be easy to draw upon them to shape policies that would be close to those advocated by the radical right: in other words that we should open our doors only to highly-qualified migrants and shut them to the far greater number of people who want to emigrate to Europe from their own country to escape poverty, but are very difficult to integrate into our communities, especially if they are uneducated and backward Muslims.

MATTERS OF OPINION

Old" Europe seems more tolerant than the "new"

Do we tolerate diversity less the longer we live with it? That would seem to be the conclusions of a recent Gallup survey of xenophobia in Europe. People enjoy the benefits of a society that contains a mix of races, religions and cultures, but the more diverse our societies become, the more we seek to limit the tendency and punish illegal immigrants.

Populations of the EU-15 countries – the "old" member states, which have a long history of immigration to their countries – are less xenophobic on average than people in "new" member states. Sixty-five percent of citizens in the EU-15 agree that it is a good thing for society to be made up of people from different races, religions and cultures, compared to 58% in the 10 countries that joined the EU in 2004.

On the other hand, while only 43% of people in new EU member states think there is a limit to the amount of diversity a society can accept, 65% of people in the EU-15 are clear that there definitely is a limit. The latter also tend to be much tougher on illegal

But are these data really final? Don't they depend on us, on our culture, on our aims, on our age and on other factors that are subject to change? Many Europeans might be surprised by the studies I have referred to, as we have always thought of Americans as more open to risk, uncertainty and diversity than we European. Their population is also younger than ours, and so their propensity to accept change and diversity should be greater than ours. But if Americans turn out to be so wary of diversity, what can we expect from ourselves? My answer has to be that we can expect from ourselves a frank recognition of what sort of society we want to be, and what we are prepared to do to achieve it.

Europe's ageing population is being accentuated by low birth rates that promise even-fewer native Europeans, with an increasingly large share of them made-up of over-65. We are already suffering from labour shortages, and it's not just highly-qualified positions that we're unable to fill because our human resources are insufficient. The problem is due to get even worse, and our economic growth will be at stake, and with it Europe's future in the world. The options before us are therefore clear. If we prefer to defend our European identities as they are now, and avoid tensions and conflicts in our own backyards by reducing the number of newcomers, we must also accept our own decline, for Europe most definitely will decline, just as many other societies have done in the past. But if we do not accept this gloomy prospect, we can still prevent it from happening. We have to be aware, though, that it is not enough for us to rely on what is for the moment the prevailing political correctness. That is what the

immigration: nearly six out of ten, on average, want illegal immigrants to be sent back to their country of origin without exception. In new member states, fewer than half of the population supports such a black and white approach. Interestingly, two southernmost countries occupy either end of the spectrum on this issue: Malta is the least hard-line (29%), while Greece is the toughest (81%).

IS IT GOOD FOR SOCIETIES TO INCLUDE PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT RACES, RELIGIONS AND CULTURES ?

EU-15   65% YES

EU-10   58% YES

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American lesson I've cited is telling us.

We in Europe will go on having different views on this delicate and crucial matter, but it would be a profound mistake for us to disagree amongst ourselves on the basic facts. For it is a fact the contact theory does not necessarily reflect reality. Contact between different ethnic and religious groups may – and in a number of cases does – lead to conflict, to reduced trust and all the other negative consequences described by Putnam. But as Putnam himself writes, "it would be equally unfortunate if an ahistorical and ethnocentric conservatism were to deny that addressing that challenge is both feasible and desirable."

Addressing the challenge is feasible, but it will also be demanding on several fronts. We need to concert our actions with future immigrants' countries of origin and aim to achieve well-planned and smoothly-conducted inflows of migrants in relation to the needs of our labour markets. We also need to equip ourselves with the services to cope with the new residents, who will themselves be contributing to our economic growth through their labour and their taxes. We need to ensure that our own citizens are not deprived of these services and we must be careful to adopt local policies that promote education (not just schooling) and communication. We must be especially effective in fighting criminality, for nothing is more devastating than the public's identification of immigrants as criminals. That also means combating illegal immigration, for that is both a criminal business and a nightmare for migrants who put their own lives at risk and for our own citizens who perceive it as an overwhelming human flood.

What is needed, therefore, is vision. This is a mission that has to be pursued convincingly, with a number of actions being carried out effectively. This means doing much more than preaching political correctness. Yet even if we manage to do all these things successfully, that will still leave the thorniest issue unresolved: how can we bridge the gap between our own communities and the growing Muslim population? Terrorism concerns have made this issue harder than ever, and it is not just the conservative right that holds negative views. But it is a challenge that depends on us to understand that we do not face a single Muslim diversity problem, but rather several Muslim diversities that if well handled could help nurture pluralism in our societies, while also dealing with unacceptable differences like gender inequality that are actually due more to backwardness than to religion. It will be up to us to accept or reject the lessons of our own history, especially in the Mediterranean countries that were melting pots for all the different people who caused them to flourish in centuries past.

The trends of today and tomorrow are making our societies in Europe increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. But attributing to all of these our own preferred values will not be enough. We have to be aware that they may yet turn into nightmare if we leave them to develop according to their natural dynamics. Jacques Barzun, that distinguished US-based modern historian, wrote years ago that the onset of Europe's decadence began when we turned off the wonderful engine that had been moulding a European identity that encompassing so many others, thus inter-twining Europe's diverse societies. I believe that engine still exists, and that the question is whether we still know how to turn it back on?

> Email to Giuliano Amato

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