



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

on Giuliano Amato's "How and why Europe must embrace ethnic diversity"

by Cem Özdemir

Sir,

Giuliano Amato is right to demand greater political vision in Europe over our multi-cultural future. But over-reliance on studies from the US to analyse the immigration situation in Europe is misguided. We cannot simply project US "reality" onto Europe, not least because of one remarkable difference between the two regions. Unlike people in the USA or Canada, Europeans still have trouble identifying even second-generation immigrants as citizens. We tend to define them by ethnic origin, colour or religion. The expression "a Turk with a German passport" is a telling example of this mentality.



> Original Article
by Giuliano Amato

It is crucial to change such public attitudes if we are going to create an atmosphere in Europe in which immigrants can more easily identify with their adopted countries. You cannot point the finger of blame at government failures and ignore the fact that immigrants and their organizations have responsibilities in the process, too. Nevertheless it is clear that, if we want to make progress, European states must change the tone of political discourse on immigration and integration.

This holds especially true when it comes to Muslims. Amato makes an important point when he reminds us that Muslims are not the homogenous group so often presented in politics, public discussion and the media. There are conservative Muslims, fundamentalists, secularists, women who wear headscarves and those who don't. Some Muslims fast during Ramadan, others never have fasted but still consider their identity to be connected to Islam. I believe that recognizing diversity is part of the answer to Amato's question, "How can we bridge the gap between our own communities and the growing Muslim population?" It is a precondition for establishing basic dialogue with Muslims, upon which cooperation can be built. Furthermore, by understanding the distinctions within Muslim communities, we would be better placed to identify groups and individuals who might become bridge-builders and those black sheep, especially among young people, who will resist integration.

When it comes to political strategies, however, the importance of education policy cannot be overemphasised. It is our basic responsibility to offer migrant children equal opportunities in our education system. The OECD's well-known PISA study revealed a clear correlation between parents' socio-economic background and their children's success in school. While this effect varies among OECD countries, it is so strong in Germany that some experts even consider it institutional discrimination. Ultimately, Europe's success or failure in the integration challenge will be measured by its efforts to improve the educational opportunities of immigrant children.

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