

Europe **Martyn Bond**

Multiculturalism has failed. So said Chancellor Angela Merkel in a speech in Potsdam last October. David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy both echoed her opinion early this year. But it is not easy to know just what they meant. The term is open to so many interpretations and used in so many different ways. Is it an ideology, a set of policies, or a social reality?

IN SOME WAYS THE TERM CONFUSES MORE THAN IT clarifies. If political declarations could do the trick, those speeches might have buried the debate, but the obstinate facts behind the term cannot be brushed aside with political declarations. A recent report – *Living Together: Combining Diversity and Freedom in 21st Century Europe*, written by a group including Joschka Fischer, Emma Bonino, Timothy Garton Ash, and Martin Hirsch and commissioned by the Council of Europe – avoids using the term but deals with the substance. Diversity, it declares, is Europe's destiny. The continent is a patchwork quilt of languages and tribes, the residue of migrations over several thousand years. Today's migratory flux is little different from the past, except that migrants arrive in larger numbers and, in some cases, come from further afield. It is a fact of globalisation.

As in the past, however, many immigrants into Europe remain attached to their heritage, recreating for themselves and with their neighbours the familiar culture of their previous home. Culture determines identity, and maintaining traditional religious faith can help bond communities – a little Anatolia in Berlin, an echo of Algeria in the Parisian suburbs, a miniature Pakistan in the English Midlands.

But, the Report asks, what is wrong with multiple identities? If



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the United States (US) can live with African- or Italian-Americans, why can Europe not accept 'hyphenated Europeans' – Turkish-Germans, North African-Frenchmen or Asian-Brits? Cultural diversity has been a constant feature of European history. It has been the source of many of our continent's greatest achievements – but, when mishandled, has also played a part in some of its greatest tragedies. It represents a challenge which will continue, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, most of those who have come to Europe in recent decades expect to stay. Many immigrant families have now been in Europe for two or even three generations. Secondly, Europe is aging, which means that the economy needs more immigrants. The European Commission calculates that in the European Union (EU) alone, over the next fifty years, the workforce will potentially decrease by 100 million or so people. Without additional migration, this is a recipe for economic decline.

Europe is a crowded, urbanised and highly sophisticated society. As immigrant numbers increase and their share in the population rises, the stakes grow higher than before. Without adequate preparation and adaptation, European society will be put under intolerable strain.

But Europe's record on coping with recent immigration is not good. As numbers rise, intolerance increases and support grows for xenophobic and populist parties, leading to widespread discrimination and a large population of undocumented migrants, Islamic extremism, and the clash between respect for religion and freedom of expression. All these are indicators of a failure both of the settled population to accommodate the newcomers and of immigrants to adapt to their new environment.

The Report highlights several causes that contribute to this malaise: Europe's current economic difficulties, the fear of globalisation, and a sense of relative decline and insecurity added to distorted media images, harmful stereotypes of minorities, inherent prejudice against foreigners in public opinion, and a shortage of leaders who can inspire confidence by articulating a clear and positive vision of Europe's destiny.

To minimise the strains in society, the Report argues that all long-term residents in European countries should be accepted as full citizens – and all, whatever their faith, culture or ethnicity, must be treated equally by the law, the authorities and their fellow citizens. As residents in Europe, they should enjoy the protection of the European Convention on Human Rights, and like all other citizens in a democracy, they should have a say in making the law. But neither their religion nor their culture can be an excuse for breaking it.

To apply these principles in practice, the Report urges states to

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extend the full rights and obligations of citizenship, including the right to vote, to as many of their resident population as possible and – as an interim step – to give all foreign residents the right to vote in local elections. At a minimum, newcomers should obey the law, learn the language used by the majority of their new neighbours, and make themselves economically useful in their new society.

The Report proposes seventeen guiding principles, which policymakers, opinion leaders and civil society activists can refer to as a checklist for positive diversity. Much of the Report is couched in terms of ‘should’ rather than ‘must.’ It explicitly states that it aims to “minimise compulsion and maximise persuasion”. Hence many of its recommendations are addressed as much to civil society as to public authorities. Teachers, the media, employers, trade unions, civil society, churches and religious groups, celebrities and other role models, all have a role to play in changing public attitudes in the direction of greater tolerance and mutual respect.

The Report starts from the universal validity of human rights reflected in the European Convention of Human Rights, but it does not shy away from suggesting special measures to ensure that members of disadvantaged or marginalised groups within Europe enjoy genuine equality of opportunity. The Report describes the treatment of Roma, for instance, as “a standing reproach to the entire continent”.

At the same time special treatment does not imply special privileges. The right to freedom of expression must not be curtailed, by law or practice, to appease violent intimidation by minorities asserting values that are not shared by the wider community, as in the case of the cartoons of Mohammed. Nor should public statements tending to build or reinforce public prejudice against members of any group – immigrants or others – be left unanswered by figures in society who command respect. Laws against discrimination in all areas of public life should not only be explained to the wider public – take the recent burqa ban in France, for instance – so that they rest on an accepted consensus, but also fully implemented in practice.

The Report urges states to present citizens with a more realistic picture of Europe’s economic and demographic needs. While states have a right and duty to control immigration, all Europeans should treat asylum seekers and migrants arriving in Europe fairly and humanely, with appropriate solidarity and burden-sharing among European states. Countries should work towards a comprehensive, coherent and transparent immigration policy with a view to minimising the acute local problems – for instance, in the Mediterranean – that often hit the headlines. EU states reneging on the principle of free movement by dismantling the Schengen Agreement is no answer, though this has been the first reaction to Italy’s granting temporary residence permits to recent migrants, allowing them to travel freely to neighbouring countries. At the same time they should reach out to Europe’s neighbours in the Middle East and

North Africa, offering them the chance to participate in European institutions and European conventions that help to ease the problematic aspects of migration in countries of origin, as well as countries of destination.

Beyond its strategic recommendations, the Report also proposes more than forty specific measures to improve the situation: facilitating migrants’ access to citizenship, easing the practical plight of asylum seekers, developing education in what it terms “intercultural competencies” and media literacy, as well as guidelines for ending discrimination in the media and promoting a better balanced narrative about migration. It also proposes measures to monitor discrimination, racism and xenophobia at local and regional as well as national levels, and urges politicians not to seek political advantage by pandering to extremists and playing the migration card.

It is no small mountain to climb, but the Report is confident that, if states recognise its principles and follow its recommendations, Europe’s democratic security could be better assured. It would become a less anxious and more hopeful place than it is today. The term ‘multiculturalism’ may be played out, but the reality of diversity in our European societies still needs considerable attention if we are to manage it without sacrificing some of the freedoms that have made Europe attractive in the first place.

The Report was produced by the Group of Eminent Persons established by the Council of Europe - Joschka Fischer, Emma Bonino, Timothy Garton Ash, Martin Hirsch, Danuta Hübner, Ay e Kadio lu, Sonja Licht, Vladimir Lukin and Javier Solana. The Group Secretary was Edward Mortimer, and the full text of the Report can be found at www.coe.int. Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, will address a meeting on this issue at Chatham House on 7 June.

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Without adequate preparation and adaptation, European society will be put under intolerable strain.

International Events June

- JUNE 5** World Environment Day marked
- JUNE 5** Parliamentary election takes place in Portugal
- JUNE 9** European Central Bank Governing Council meets in Frankfurt
- JUNE 20** World Refugee Day commemorated
- JUNE 30** Mandate of UN disengagement observer force in Golan Heights expires
- JUNE 30** Mandate of Monusco UN mission in DR Congo ends

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