

Politicians' Statements on Mixed Societies in Europe: Identity, Diversity, Responsibility¹

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“We sent for workers but, instead, we got people. They do not devour our prosperity; on the contrary, they are essential for our prosperity.”²

This paper does not deal directly with policies referring to identity, diversity, and responsibility in a modern and rapidly diversifying Europe; instead it considers certain fundamental principles referring to these concepts and then examines examples of written or spoken on-the-record public statements by politicians on the three topics. These questions now concern Europe as a whole and every European country, large and small, whether newer members, founder members, or non-members, of the European Union. The politicians' statements in question concern diversities arising from i) labour market migration and ii) from existing political, religious, linguistic or other differences within a given society. For the sake of brevity, the examples and analyses will be restricted to statements made in two countries of the European Union, Germany and Ireland. However, as indicated, the principles under discussion apply everywhere.

The particular importance of the public statements to be examined lies in the fact their authors want them to be reported in the media and to feed into the street-level talking and thinking about newcomers, or opponents, or minorities, and their place in society as a whole. Language plays a crucial role in creating, stabilizing, reproducing, or changing the system of beliefs, values, and categories through which a person or a society comprehends the world.

Frisch's statement above introduces two fundamental strands going through the paper: on the one hand humans and their individual rights which belong intrinsically to the persons themselves in order to protect them from domination; and on the other hand the collectivity, whether in the form of the economy, of the state, or of society.

Usually it is only the first sentence of the above statement by Frisch placing the emphasis on individual humans, which is quoted. The second sentence, however, expresses

¹ This is a slightly re-written version of a presentation given on 5 November 2007 at the international conference “Ethics in Democracy: How can Ethics shape Political Life?” held in Riga on 5th and 6th November 2007.

² “Man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kamen Menschen. Sie fressen den Wohlstand nicht auf, im Gegenteil, sie sind für den Wohlstand unerlässlich“. Max Frisch, from his preface to A.J. Seiler, *Siamo Italiani*, Zurich 1965.

advantages only for the collectivity – and workers are being instrumentalised for the economy as a source of the general material good. This illustrates an ambivalence in Frisch and points to the unstable and constantly shifting balance between these two major elements in any society - the individual and the collective.

Frisch is referring here to inward migration: in the specific case, Italian workers entering Switzerland. But the points he raises are valid for all countries; they introduce themes of this paper: diversity, and responsibility, and the latter includes the insistence that “workers” are “people”. What Frisch is implying is a failure on the part of government and civil society to prepare Switzerland for the inevitable consequences of their actions. He is saying that Switzerland had thought purely in terms of labour market needs and had overlooked human needs.³

In any discussion of society, and particularly of a mixed society, the notion of social capital is vital. This term requires a little explanation. To quote a very recent book,⁴ “Social capital is arguably the most critical concept to emerge in the social sciences in the last twenty years”. It is defined in the following way, “Social capital speaks of the importance of social networks, of communication, and of an exchange of resources that strengthens community”. “The standard claim is: interaction breeds trust (including inter-group trust), and trust makes other good things happen.” To summarise, “Social capital creates bridging networks, with beneficial consequences for democracy.” The central notion here is trust.

This book deals with the importance of social capital in Canada because Canada now has such a patchwork society. But in this it is not unique. And the relevance both for the conference where this paper was first presented and for any discussion of European societies lies in the fact that all European and EU countries are now in different measures mixed societies. They are now the European norm. In addition, the European Commission is now arguing for significant inward migration – and with arguments, which are irresistible. But are all the arguments responsible? I shall come back to this when at the end of the paper I examine briefly one absolutely fundamental point in what Franco Frattini, European Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, said at the High-Level Conference on Legal Immigration in Lisbon on 13 September 2007.

The notion of “Responsibility” in my title is being applied in the sense that “should” can coincide with “can”: that is, an ethical standard of behaviour is possible and can be achieved in public life, including the demands of political life, whether in debates in the legislature or election campaigns. The conclusion of this paper outlines the ethical standards in question and, building on the discussion below, provides justification for their application.

³ A particularly harsh assessment of the inhuman and arrogant treatment of immigrant workers on whose labour the wealthy consumer society of Europe depended in the 1960’s and 1970’s can be found in Michel Tournier’s autobiographical sketches *Le vent Paraquet*, Gallimard, Paris 1977, page 230.

⁴ Eds. Fiona M. Kay and Richard Johnston, *Social Capital, Diversity, and the Welfare State*, UBC Press, Vancouver B.C. 2007.

Specifically, the public statements to be examined now are the following: firstly an argument made by Karin Wolff, Minister of Education of the German state of Hesse in the State Parliament in Wiesbaden on 18 February 2004, during the debates in early 2004 when a bill was introduced to make it illegal for a teacher to wear a headscarf while teaching⁵; and secondly statements from the election platforms of parties contesting seats in the general elections held in Ireland on 24 May 2007.

In all of these cases we are dealing with notions of identity – as represented in the society, the people, and in individuals. What I want to show with these two sets of examples are different ways in which politicians reacted publicly to diversity within their respective countries. And I shall relate these reactions to questions of responsibility.

In the light of the two fundamental factors: a diversity within countries which will only increase, and the particular importance of the bridging social capital which links groups within a given population, the question to be borne in mind in considering all the statements is the likely impact the statement will have on the degree of trust between groups. In other words, “Will the statements create, encourage, or diminish the development of trust?” In every country of modern Europe this is now an absolutely fundamental question. Trust is essential for social cohesion.⁶

Germany

The background situation is that a citizen appealed to the Federal Constitutional Court because an education authority in Baden-Wurtemberg (the *Oberschulamts* in Stuttgart) had refused to employ her as a teacher. The refusal arose because she wished to wear a headscarf while teaching. The Court agreed that her rights had been breached because there was no basis in Baden-Wurtemberg state law for the education authority’s decision. The Court further said that a state may ban or permit such religious garments and symbols, but if it did so, it must treat all religions equally. In addition, what is particularly relevant for our discussion now is the following argument in the court’s decision, “[. . .] there is good reason to incorporate the increasing religious diversity in schools as part of an effort to promote tolerance and in this way to contribute to integration”.⁷

The Court says, then, that in the face of an increasingly diverse society, what had previously been seen as pertaining to German identity (certain practices within the civil service favouring Christian symbols) may change, and even should change. It is

⁵ *Gesetzentwurf der Fraktion der CDU für ein Gesetz zur Sicherung der staatlichen Neutralität* (Hessischer Landtag Drucksache 16/1897 neu).

⁶ On this topic, readers may refer, for example, to the series of publications of the Council of Europe “Trends in Social Cohesion”.

⁷ “Es ließen sich deshalb Gründe dafür anführen, die zunehmende religiöse Vielfalt in der Schule aufzunehmen und als Mittel für die Einübung von gegenseitiger Toleranz zu nutzen, um so einen Beitrag in dem Bemühen um Integration zu leisten.” §65 of the Judgement of the Second Chamber of the Federal Constitutional Court, 24 September 2003. BVerfG, 2 BvR 1436/02 vom 3.6.2003, Absatz-Nr. (1 - 140), available at http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rs20030924_2bvr143602.htm

suggesting or even promoting a change in attitudes, views, and behaviour on the part of the majority population. In other words, a shift in the shared value system – a shift in national identity.

Within Germany, these points touched a very raw nerve. The two Christian parties had long propagated the notion that Germany is a Christian country: they have successfully encouraged people and also themselves to avoid making the vital distinction between the constitutional obligation of neutrality on the part of the state on the one hand, and the fact that persons have no such obligation. In other words, the majority of citizens may indeed be Christian, but the state is not.⁸

Consequently, and despite the Federal Constitutional Court's decision, in a number of the individual states within Germany (for instance, Baden-Wurtemberg, Bavaria, Hesse, the Sarre, Bremen, Berlin) bills were promptly introduced by the Christian parties to prohibit the headscarf. However, despite the court's strict admonition that any prohibition of religious garments or symbols was permissible if it applied equally to members of all religions,⁹ the same bills implicitly or explicitly authorised indications or symbols of Christianity.

Within the field of political rhetoric one device which has been known to be effective since antiquity is to speak in terms of a threat to the collectivity, whether religious, national, or cultural. "They" are threatening "us". In the French Revolution, for example, it was the slogan "La patrie en danger". And when "they" are not just any identifiable human group endangering "our" way of life, but can be labelled as "foreign", then the device can be all the more effective.

It is this device which was repeatedly the basis of the public argumentation in moving the bills just mentioned. It is to be found in the written explanations accompanying the texts of the bills mentioned above, and it is the foundation of the arguments of the members of state parliaments who supported the bills.¹⁰

⁸ This is particularly controversial, and even contested, in Germany, where certain state constitutions are interpreted as referring to Christianity and its values or refer directly to those values: see, for example, Articles 1, 15 and 16 of the Baden-Wurtemberg Constitution, the draft bill in Hesse mentioned above, the commentary to the Bavarian bill (Bayerischer Landtag Drucksache 15/368), the Bavarian bill as passed on 11 November 2004 (Drucksache 15/1964), and the Baden-Wurtemberg bill and commentary (Landtag von Baden-Württemberg Drucksache 15/2793). On the other hand, the Federal Constitution, (*Grundgesetz*) contains no mention of Christianity and protects the free exercise of religion, without mentioning any specific confession or religion.

Some of the challenges facing pluralist democracies because of the shifting religious composition of their populations are well outlined in Ulrich Willems and Michael Minkenberg "Politik und Religion im Übergang – Tendenzen und Forschungsfragen am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts" in *Politik und Religion*, ed. Minkenberg and Willems, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift: Sonderheft 33/ 2002*, Wiesbaden, Westdeutscher Verlag 2003.

⁹ §71.

¹⁰ For example, Annette Schavan (Minister of Education of Baden-Wurtemberg) in the State Parliament of Baden-Wurtemberg on 4 February 2004.

As mentioned in the introduction, I shall discuss only one example: it is perhaps the most extreme in its tone, but it is certainly it is very representative of a concerted campaign repeated from state to state to state during 2004 and partly into 2005. It is thus meant to spread across the country, be reported in the media, and pushed into public consciousness over and over again.

Developing her ideas from the report that two non-governmental organisations, the Islamic Council and the Central Council of Muslims in Germany,¹¹ had paid the legal costs of the citizen who had brought the case to the Federal Constitutional Court, the Minister of Education of Hesse made the following statement, “But when in our state, which is neutral in religious and political matters, religious minorities use the fundamental rights contained in our constitution against our state – we are certainly justified in protecting ourselves from such efforts.”¹²

With its use of the threat topos mentioned above, this is meant to be an appealing argument; it contains in fact a number of hidden (or not-so-hidden) implications worth exploring.

- The implied premise that head-scarf wearers are in a plot to undermine the state (many would see this as treason);
- The implication that minorities are not allowed access to the courts to assert their rights in the same way that the majority population is;
- The implication that “religious minorities” are not part of “us”, of “our” state – i.e. they are not German, and they do not belong here;
- Consequently, these “religious minorities” should not be permitted the liberties and rights that “we” have.

The argument legitimises the absoluteness of the German / Muslim opposition which is in the foreground in the consistent argumentation and terminology repeatedly employed by parties of the Centre-Right. At the same time, it is playing off one group of permanent residents within the population against another, and the minority group as a whole is being demonised as a consistent threat to whatever values the recipient of the statement wishes to associate with his constitution, society, state, and country.

The significance of this statement is its repetition, in an on-the-record speech by a member of the Hessian Cabinet, of important items of street-level xenophobic arguments and terminology. In doing so, the Minister is giving these arguments and terms greater legitimacy and is appealing to the regrettable human tendency to exclude others. She is reinforcing prejudices against what is a significant portion of the population. But even if the proportion were not significant, the situation would still be irresponsible. Verbally the minister is denying a minority their rights as citizens or persons; she is equating difference on the part of a minority with danger for the majority. She creates a false polar

¹¹ *Der Islamrat and der Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland.*

¹² “Aber dass in unserem weltanschaulich neutralen Staat religiöse Minderheiten die Grundrechte unseres Grundgesetzes gegen unseren Staat ausspielen, dagegen müssen wir uns zur Wehr setzen dürfen.” (18 February 2004)

opposition between an in-group presented as totally right, and an out-group presented as totally wrong.

This is in my view a clear overstepping of the line of ethical conduct. For the sake of short-term party-political gain, and totally contrary to the position of the Federal Constitutional Court, the minister and those like her took up an extremist position which treated all Muslims as enemies to be crushed. And she encouraged members of the majority population to think in exactly the same terms. She, and other ministers and members of state parliaments, failed to treat a minority group which is legally in the country, and which was behaving absolutely legally in its appeal to the courts, as a legitimate partner in society.

A politician can argue for the advantage of her party, as politicians must, and one can oppose the other's point of view very strongly without demonising either them or any group in society. In party politics it is possible for "Can" to coincide with the ethical notion of "Should". That is why I argue that this concrete example and all those like it, whether in other German states, or other countries, are unethical and irresponsible.

Ireland

The discussion will turn to the question of labour-market migration into Ireland in a moment. But to talk about diversity in Ireland without mentioning the following would be misleading.

It is fair to say that Ireland's history and identity (as perceived both inside and outside the country) have been marked by centuries of conflict with England and by English domination. And these factors are seen as having been very foreign and very harmful. In the debate on the Official Languages Bill in 2002, a member of the Senate of Ireland made the following statement concerning the near disappearance of the Irish language due to the English presence in Ireland, "As the House will be aware, Soviet domination was somewhat similar to the domination experienced in this country. It was not just a physical domination, it was also cultural in nature. In this country, this domination literally wiped out the Irish language."¹³

Ireland's separation from the United Kingdom was painful, having been achieved only by violence: first an armed rebellion in 1916, then a war with Britain, followed by a civil war in 1922-23 over the nature of the new state and residual links with the United Kingdom. Part of this painful process was the division of Ireland, with the six counties of the north remaining part of the UK. The wounds were, and still are, very deep. Consequently the following public statement from the 2007 Election Manifesto of the Irish Labour Party is quite remarkable in its even-handed acknowledgement of diversity and its reconciliation with one-time adversaries and enemies. It is particularly remarkable in its movement from divisive to inclusive. The aim of the statement is to reinforce a sense of national identity precisely by overcoming the previous polar oppositions between in-groups and out-groups. The manifesto states, "As part of the

¹³ Seanad Éierann, Mr. Mooney, 24 April, 2002.

preparations for the centenary [of the Easter Rising] we will commission the preparation of a definitive list of all those who died in the conflict on our island in the period from Easter 1916 to the end of the civil war. The list will be inclusive. It will include northerners and southerners, British and Irish, combatants and non-combatants, and it will include a description of the circumstances of each of their deaths.”¹⁴

With this proposal, the Irish Labour Party is directly confronting diversity of opinion, of allegiance, of religion, of ethnic origin, and of national identity. It is doing it in a way designed to bridge historical and present divisions and to create cohesion and social capital within the island of Ireland as a whole. Its responsibility lies in the fact that it is not attempting to obtain short-term gains from injustices and “traditional” hostilities, but on the contrary is dealing even-handedly with all, is overcoming the earlier demonisations, and is acknowledging that people of all allegiances were victims equally in the foundation process of the new state.

Now to turn to the diversity arising from very recent labour market migration into Ireland:

In the 21st century, Ireland is entering into diversity as never before. According to a report in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 27 September 2007, the Taoiseach – the Prime Minister of Ireland – stated in an interview that currently 9% of the active work force in his country is composed of non-nationals.

It is revealing, then, to look at how Irish parties are now speaking publicly about the massive and increasing presence of “non-nationals” in their country. The general statement which can be made is that, across the political spectrum, all parties use language which clearly communicates approval of immigration into Ireland. Significantly, the parties do not use the term “Migration”. Instead, they speak of “immigrants” and “immigration” with their clear implication that newcomers will stay. In addition, they tend to avoid the terms “foreign” and “foreigner”, which have connotations of alien origins and customs, in favour of the more neutral “non-national”.

Fianna Fáil, the majority party in the current coalition government (Fall 2007), made the following statement at the head of the section “Immigration” in their manifesto for the May elections, “Fianna Fáil recognises that a fair and strategic immigration policy is imperative to sustaining a strong economy. We welcome immigrants who come here to work legally to support Ireland’s development and we will help them to become full and active participants in Irish life.”¹⁵

What Fianna Fáil is doing here (along with the other parties: Progressive Democrats, Labour, Sinn Féin, Fine Gael, and the Green Party, all of whom make comparable statements) is preparing the Irish people for the realities of immigration. By that I mean that many of the persons recently arrived, or who will come to Ireland, will stay. It is clear also that immigration from non-EU states is included in parties’ thinking. The

¹⁴ *The Fair Society: Labour Manifesto 2007.*

¹⁵ *Now, the Next Steps: Fianna Fáil Manifesto 2007.*

Progressive Democrats speak of “set[ting] out a clear and fair structure for immigration from non-EU states in the future”.¹⁶ Three manifestos also include positive and explicit statements concerning access to citizenship via the naturalisation process (Fine Gael, Greens, and Labour). This is in addition to the principle whereby anyone born on the island of Ireland is entitled to Irish citizenship.¹⁷ And given that the nature of the states in which we all live is participation, what Fianna Fáil terms “full and active participation” must also be considered an ethical good as it is based on the equality of human beings.

The parties are presenting the newcomers as people – not just as workers to be instrumentalised for “our” wellbeing.

To refer back to the opening quotation from Max Frisch: workers are people; and people put down roots, have families, and stay.

The European Union

The European Union is now advancing further into the field of immigration – though it often prefers to mask immigration behind such terms as “mobility” and “migration”. The speech “Enhanced mobility, vigorous integration strategy and zero tolerance on illegal immigration: a dynamic approach to European immigration policies” given in Lisbon on 13 September 2007 by Commissioner Frattini is related to the whole question of labour-market migration and immigration. Virtually every country in Europe and the European Union is looking for labour. In many cases, though not all, they are looking principally for skilled labour and particularly highly-skilled labour. They are doing so for the sake of their own advantage: the maintenance of prosperity in an era and a future where the working population is shrinking and the proportion of elderly people who need support is growing.

This public statement announcing the Council Directive of 23 October on the movement of skilled third-country nationals into the EU¹⁸ faces up to some of the responsibilities and ethical questions arising from labour recruitment from third-countries for EU-European advantage. It announces policies to ensure that such workers are guaranteed essential rights. At the same time it shows awareness of ethical questions arising from depriving the countries of origin of their skilled labour. However, it speaks in terms of “circular migration . . . widely believed to work to the benefit of both countries of origin and countries of destination”. However, this sounds very much like the *Rotationsprinzip*, the rotation principle which was the foundation of policy in Germany in the 60s, and which had the goal of preventing foreign workers from staying. It signally

¹⁶ Section “Immigration and Integration” in *From Good to Great: Continuing Ireland’s Radical Transformation, General Election Manifesto 2007*.

¹⁷ *Information leaflet No. 1, General Information on Irish Citizenship* (effective as of 30th November 2002), downloaded from the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, www.inis.gov.ie, 15 October, 2007.

¹⁸ *Proposal for a Council Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment*, COM(2007) 637 final.

failed.¹⁹ To refer to Frisch again, “We called for workers and we got people”. And people have families, they put down roots, become immigrants in the normal English-language sense of the word, and they stay. The questionable, and even problematic, nature of a policy of “circular migration” is indicated by the joint call for research proposals by the International Metropolis Project and the Population, Migration and Environment Foundation (of Zurich) on the topic of “Impact of skilled worker migration and return migration”.²⁰ At the same time, the European Union has cooperated with a range of organisations and published in October 2007 the new Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)²¹ covering government policies towards third-country nationals (or stateless persons) resident within their borders. Whether this is intended or not to put pressure on individual governments, civil society cannot know for sure. On the other hand, on the basis of over one hundred policy indicators it makes very clear the huge range of governmental positions (and one can reasonably assume that these are accompanied by an equally wide range of political language), from Sweden as the most integration friendly to Latvia²² as the least.

Conclusion

So, where does the preceding discussion lead us in the democracies of present-day Europe? The following three principles which foreground some of the fundamental issues briefly discussed above can serve as a conclusion for this paper and also as a starting point for further discussions of politicians’ statements concerning both immigration and resident mixed populations in individual countries in the European Union and in the continent of Europe as a whole.

- No public statement concerning mobility which is advantageous only to the receiving society can be considered responsible. Ethical behaviour implies a path which transcends self-interest.
- No public statement which seeks to hide from the receiving society the permanence of a significant proportion of the inward movement of people can be considered responsible. To do so is misleading.
- No public statement seeking to, or which is likely to, maintain, strengthen or create divisions between identifiable groups within a population can be

¹⁹ An overview of the policy and reasons for its failure are to be found in the following article: Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos and Karen Schonwalder, “How the Federal Republic Became an Immigration Country: Norms, Politics and the Failure of West Germany’s Guest Worker System”, *German Politics and Society*, vol. 24/3 (Autumn 2006) pp. 1-19. The foreign policy options and liberal democratic principles they cite as factors contributing to the failure are present today in at least equal measure.

²⁰ To be found on http://www.international.metropolis.net/pdf/annouc_4thcfp_pme07.pdf, November 2007.

²¹ A summary report in tabular form is available at www.integrationindex.eu; the full report is to be found at www.integrationindex.eu/multiversions/2712/FileName/MIPEX-2006-2007-final.pdf.

²² An ongoing empirical study of Latvian politicians’ language with respect to minorities and post-war immigrants (i.e. ethnic Russians who were moved to Latvia in the Soviet period) is being conducted by the Riga-based NGO PROVIDUS in the project “Shrinking Citizenship: A Challenge to Civil Society and Public Participation”. The interim report is available at <http://www.providus.lv/public/27106.html>.

considered responsible. It is destructive of the fundamental pluralistic nature of European society.